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Heroes of chivalry and romance

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HOW THEY CARRIED SCYLD TO THE SHIP.

HEROES OF CHIVALRY AND ROMANCE

By the

REV. A. J. CHURCH, M.A.

Formerly Professor of Latin in University College, London,
Author of "Stories from Homer," &c.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
GEORGE MORROW

FIFTH EDITION

LONDON
SEELEY, SERVICE & CO. LIMITED
38, GREAT RUSSELL STREET

1913

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UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED, THE GRESHAM PRESS, WOKING AND LONDON.

Q 68967

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PREFACE

IN writing the story of Beowulf I have been helped by Kemble's translation and notes, and still more by Professor Earle's admirable edition. In telling the Nibelung tale I have always had at hand the translation by Mr W N. Lettsom, and have also made use of a version made by Miss Alice Horton and published this year under the editorship of Mr. Edward Bell. I desire thankfully to acknowledge the obligation under which I stand to both these works.

A. J. C.

Sept. 3, 1898.

THEY WERE
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THE STORY OF BEOWULF

CHAPTER I

THE SLAYING OF GRENDEL

IN the days of old the House of the Scyldings bare rule in Denmark. The first of the line was Scyld, whom men called "Son of the Sheaf" because he came no man knew whence, being a little child in a boat with a sheaf of corn. He grew to be a mighty man of valour, subduing the robber tribes that sailed over the seas seeking for plunder, and compelling the nations round about to pay him tribute. A good King was he and a great, and God gave him a son for the comfort of his people, for He knew in what evil case that nation stands that lacks a king to rule over it.

Now the time came that King Scyld must die, for he had grown old and feeble. So he said to his warriors, "Carry me, comrades, to the shore, for as I came by the sea, so by the sea must I go." So they carried him to the shore; there stood his ship, newly adorned, and with sails set

as for a voyage. There in the middle of the ship, hard by the mast, did the comrades of Scyld the King lay down their dead lord. And they laid with him many precious things, ornaments gathered from many far countries. Never have I heard of ship that was adorned in more comely fashion with warriors' gear and weapons of war, battle-axes and coats of mail. Rich in truth was the store that they put in his keeping that he might carry them with him far away into the land of waters. Not less, then, was the wealth that he took than that which he brought. With empty hands he came, but he departed with a king's treasure. And over his head they set up a banner wrought in gold. And the helm they left free that the sea might take him whithersoever it would. But who received that burden not the wisest man that is under heaven knows to this day.

King Scyld having thus gone to his place, Beowulf his son reigned in his stead for many years even unto old age; and after Beowulf, Healfdene, a hero famous in war; and after Healfdene, Hrothgar, who excelled all that had gone before him in valiant deeds.

It came into the mind of this Hrothgar that he would build a banqueting-hall, greater than man had ever before heard tell of. And as he purposed so he did. Quickly was the hall set up

and when it was finished it was the stateliest hall in all the earth, a home of peace, towering high into the air. Nor did any that beheld it dream that there should ever be strife within it, or that its splendour should be devoured by flames.

And when the great hall was built, the King's warriors resorted to it with much joy and gladness, till there came within its doors an evil guest that worked desolation and woe. Grendel was his name, and he dwelt among the moors and fens. He was of an accursed race, the race of Cain the murderer, whom the Lord separated from the children of men. For, indeed, of this first father come all strange broods, giants, and elves, and ogres.

On a certain night, when the darkness had fallen, this Grendel set forth to search out this lofty hall, and to see how the Danes had bestowed themselves in it. A princely troop he found sleeping after the feast. Thirty of them did the monster seize, and hied him back to his den, rejoicing with loud cries over his prey. But when the day broke all men might see what desolation he had wrought, and great was the grief of the King. Again, on the very next night, the monster came, and seized a fresh prey. And so it happened for the space of twelve winters. No man dared abide in the hall for fear of Grendel; nor did they escape him in the

chambers of the castle. Whether a man was a tried warrior, or a youth, it mattered not; all were his prey. And over the moors he wandered, seizing such as found access there. Only to the throne itself he could not approach, for God would not suffer him so to do. Oft did the nobles take counsel together how they might abate this plague; often did they offer sacrifices to their gods if haply they might win help from them; but neither sacrifice nor counsel availed.

Now in the land of the Goths there was a certain King, Hygelac by name, and this King had a nephew, whose name was Beowulf, a youth that had in him the strength of thirty men. To him came the report of King Hrothgar's trouble, and he conceived in his mind the purpose to help him. So he set sail to the land of the Danes, having fourteen comrades with him, the bravest that he could find in all the land of the Goths. All that day and all that night they sailed, and on the morrow, at the very hour of their setting out, they saw land, a land of great cliffs and of headlands jutting far out into the sea. So they drove the ship to the beach, and sprang ashore in their warriors' gear, and made fast their craft.

When the warden of the coast espied them, he rode down to the shore, with a great spear in his hand. "Who are ye," he said, "who come so boldly to this land? Many years have I been

warden in this place, having been set to watch the sea-robbers, lest they should work mischief to the land of the Danes, but never have I seen men land in more open guise. Nor do ye know, I take it, any password or token such as kinsmen have between them. Say then who ye are, for, indeed, I see among you one whose peer may not easily be found, so stalwart and strong is he to look upon. No common man is he that has decked himself out with splendid armour. But say, strangers, who ye are before ye go further into the land of the Danes."

Then Beowulf made answer: "We are of the race of the Goths, and we are come with friendly purpose to thy lord, King Hrothgar; nor is there any need to hide it. We have heard—and whether it be true or no thou knowest—that some monster comes by night to devour the King's warriors in his hall. For this evil we bring a remedy."

The warden said: "Yea, I know it well; a faithful squire must needs know the troubles of his lord. But ye, for ye seem to be a friendly company, pass on with your weapons of war, and I will bid my comrades keep watch and ward over your ship till ye return, that it may carry you safely back to the land of your birth."

So Beowulf and his company marched on, with the warden for guide of their way; and as they

went, the sun shone on the golden boars' heads that they carried on their helmets. Eager for battle they went on till they could see before them the hall of the King where it stood in its splendour. Then the warden pointed with his hand and said: "Now I must depart; for I must needs return to the shore to keep it against the approach of the enemy. And may the Almighty Father keep you in your way!"

So they marched along the path of stone till they came to the hall; there they set up their shields against the wall, and stacked their spears together, and sat down upon a bench, for they were weary with their journey.

To them came forth an officer of the King, and questioned them of their kindred and country: "Whence do ye bring," he said, "your warriors' gear, your shields and spears? Know that I am squire and herald to King Hrothgar. Never yet have I seen so fair a company of strangers. 'Tis, I trow, on some bold errand that ye are come."

The chief made reply: "We sit at the table of Hygelac, King of the Goths. As for me, I am Beowulf; my errand I will set forth to the King, if he will grant us of his good grace that we may see him."

Then said Wulfgar the herald: "I will ask the King his pleasure, and bring thee back his answer without delay."

So the herald went to where King Hrothgar sat, an old man among his warriors, and spake : "Certain men are newly come, my lord, to this place far across the sea from the land of the Goths, and the name of their chief is Beowulf. They make petition that they may see thee, and I would counsel that thou refuse not their request, for their gear is that of worthy men, and their chief is a noble prince."

The King made answer : "I knew him well when he was yet a boy. His father was Egthean, to whom Hethel the Goth gave his only daughter in marriage. And now he has grown to man's estate, and is come to visit us. And indeed it is well, for they who carried our gifts over the seas to the Goths say that he has in his grip the strength of thirty men. Haply God has sent him of His grace to help us against the monster Grendel. Go, therefore, and say to him and his company that they are welcome to the land of the Danes."

So Wulfgar the herald returned and said : "The King bids you welcome to the land of the Danes, for he knows of what race ye are. Leave, therefore, your shields and spears till ye have spoken with him."

So Beowulf and some of his company went in to speak to the King, and the others tarried behind to keep watch over the war gear.

And when they stood before the King, Beowulf stood forth and said: "Hail to thee, King Hrothgar! I am Beowulf, kinsman to King Hygelac. Many deeds of note have I done in my life, and now the report of the doings of Grendel the monster has brought me to this land. For strangers from over the sea have told us how that this fair hall stands empty of guests so soon as the evening falls. 'Twas my comrades that put the thought in my heart, for they had seen my valorous deeds, how I had conquered the foes of my country, and brought the race of the giants low, and slain monsters both on sea and on land. So now I am come, my lord King, to fight single-handed against this Grendel. Now, therefore, I make my petition to thee, O Prince, first that I may undertake this enterprise alone, and next, seeing that this monster despises weapons, that I may also forego all use of the same, and carry neither sword, nor shield, nor coat of mail to this battle. With the grip of my hands only will I deal with this enemy, struggling with him, life for life. But who shall live and who shall die, let it be as God shall will. I doubt not, O King, that if he have his way, he will devour the champions of the Goths, even as he has devoured the champions of the Danes. And as for me, thou wilt not need to lay my body in the earth and raise a

mound over it, for he will carry it off to the moors where he dwells and devour it there. Only I would pray thee to send back to King Hygelac the armour that I wear ; for it came to me by inheritance, and Weland, the smith of the gods, wrought in the old time. But that which Fate has ordered shall come to pass."

To him King Hrothgar made answer : "'Tis well, O Beowulf, that thou art come to help me in this my need, for I knew thy father in the old time ; he was a mighty man of valour, and there was a bond of friendship between him and me. But as for this Grendel, it is a shame to tell what desolation he has wrought in my hall. He has swept away the whole company of my warriors. Who can stay him in his ill-deeds ? God doubtless can do so, but I know of none besides. Often have my warriors boasted, when they were merry with their drink, that they would stand up, sword in hand, against the monster. But when morning came, lo ! the hall was bespattered with gore, and the benches reeked with blood, and I was the poorer by many brave warriors. But now, I pray thee, sit down to the feast, thou and thy brave comrades with thee."

So a table was cleared, and the warriors of the Goths sat down together in the pride of their strength. And one of the King's thanes waited on them, bearing the ale-can in his hands, and,

once and again, a minstrel sang with clear voice of the deeds of the men of old, and there was mirth in the hall.

But while they feasted envy stirred in the heart of Unferth, son of Ecglaf. He was the King's orator, and he took it ill that Beowulf should have come to the land of the Danes on this great enterprise, for he was one who could not endure that any man under heaven should do greater deeds than himself. Therefore he stood up in the hall and spake: "Art thou that Beowulf who contended with Breca in swimming on the open sea? 'Twas, indeed, a foolhardy thing so to put your lives in jeopardy, yet no man could turn you from your adventure. Seven days and nights ye toiled, one against the other, but he in the end prevailed, for he had the greater strength. And on the eighth morning the waves cast him ashore on the land of the Heathoram, whence he journeyed back to the city of the Bronding, of which he was lord. So did Breca, son of Beanstan, make good his boast against thee. And thou, I trow, wilt have worse luck than this, though doubtless thou art a sturdy warrior in the shock of battle, if thou shalt dare to abide for the space of a night the strength of the monster Grendel."

Then said Beowulf: "Surely the ale-can has wrought with thee, friend Unferth, that thou hast

said such things about Breca, the son of Beanstan, and how he strove with me in swimming. But I say to thee that in buffeting the waves of the sea I have more strength than any other man under heaven. Now hear the truth. This Breca and I, in our boyhood, when we were pages at the King's court, were wont to talk of this, how we would put our lives in jeopardy on the sea, and we made agreement to contend the one against the other. So we swam, each of us holding in one hand a sword wherewith to defend ourselves against the whale-fishes of the sea. Not one whit further than I could he swim, nor I one whit further than he. So for the space of five days and five nights we twain swam together; but on the sixth day the floods parted us, for the wind blew mightily against us from the north, and the waves were rough. So was I left alone, and then the rage of the sea-monsters was roused against me; but my coat of mail stood me in good stead against their attacks. Yet did one great beast—spotted he was with spots—seize me in his grip and drag me to the bottom of the sea. Yet strength was given me to pierce the monster with my sword, and then I slew him. Nor yet in truth was I quit of my enemies; for they pressed against me in their rage, and I dealt them blows with my sword and stinted not. They counted to devour me, foul robbers of the sea that they were, to

devour me for their supper. But they fared far otherwise. Verily they lay the next morning high and dry upon the shore, having met their fate by the sword. And truly it was a good deed to slay them, for never more would they hinder in their course such as fare across the sea. And when I had finished my task, lo! it was morning, and I saw the headlands. So does fortune rescue the warrior if he be not doomed of Fate, and if he be bold of heart. Verily it came of my good luck that I was able to slay with my sword nine monsters of the deep and to escape with my life. Never was a man more hardly pressed by the waves of the sea or put into greater peril of death. After this the sea cast me up on the land of the Finns. I have heard of no such deeds as done by thee, Unferth, son of Ecglaf; no, nor hath Breca achieved the like. And this I say to thee, that Grendel had never wrought such woe and desolation for thy King hadst thou in truth possessed the courage of which thou makest boast. But he, methinks, takes but small heed of the spearmen of the Danes, nor fears lest they requite him, slaughter for slaughter. Rather he takes toll from them at his will; he slaughters and he feasts, but he has no thought of fight. But now there has come one who shall show him what a Goth can do in battle, and shall make King Hrothgar's hall a fit abiding-place again for men."

So Beowulf spake, and the old King heard him with great joy, seeing that he was steadily purposed in his heart to contend and to prevail. So there was mirth in the hall, and much laughter of heroes, and music, and songs of rejoicing.

Then came Veleda, Queen of King Hrothgar, into the hall, clad in cloth of gold, and she bore a great beaker in her hand, for she was careful to observe all ancient customs. To the King of the East Danes first she handed the great cup, wishing him joy and the love of his lords. And after him she went the round to all the warriors where they sat in their places, the old by themselves and the young by themselves; last of all she brought the cup to Beowulf, and greeted him right courteously, and gave thanks to God that He had given them such an answer to their prayers. "For now," she said, "I believe that we have a warrior who will rid us of our troubles." Beowulf made answer to the Queen: "Lady, when I embarked on this voyage with my fellows, I promised that I would either do this deed, or perish by the hands of this monster. And to this I am bound; either I will fulfil this promise, or I will meet my death in this hall." Well pleased was the Queen with this saying, and she went in her gold attire to sit by the side of her lord, King Hrothgar.

So all the company of Danes and Goths sat in the hall, and made good cheer, till the King rose

from his place to go to his chamber. Well he knew that the time was come when the monster issued forth to his cruel deeds, for Grendel was of the creatures of darkness that come forth when the sun has set. And when he rose, all the company stood up. Then said the King to Beowulf, the while he wished him all good fortune, "Never since I first laid my right hand to the sword and bare the shield on my left have I given this hall of the Danes to any man to keep. And now I give it in trust to thee. Do thou keep it as befits its grace. Be of good hope; be valiant; watch. And verily, if thou comest with thy life out of this conflict, there is no wish in thy heart which thou shalt not see fulfilled." So King Hrothgar went to his chamber, and his chiefs followed him. But Beowulf abode still in the hall, resolved in his heart to do the service which he had promised. And first he took from off his body his stout coat of mail and doffed his helmet, and then he gave to his squire his good sword. "Keep thou," he said, "all my warrior's gear." But before he climbed up on his bed he spake aloud saying, "Now indeed I reckon myself to be not one whit behind this Grendel in deeds of war. Therefore I am resolved not to make an end of him with the sword, as well I might, for he knows nought, I trow, of the noble art of arms, how to strike with the sword and parry, though he be

expert in deeds of darkness. So it shall be that when we come to trial of our strength this night we will have no weapon in our hands. And may He who knows all things give the victory as it shall please Him."

So saying, the warrior laid him down on a bed, and round him lay many valiant lovers of the sea, his comrades in this enterprise. Without fear they lay, though there was not one who thought that he should ever see again land, and kindred, and the home of his youth, for they knew what havoc the monster Grendel had wrought in that same hall among the Danish folk. But they fared better than they had thought, for God gave them deliverance by the hand of a single champion. It pleased Him so to do, and verily He is the ruler of the world.

Meanwhile the destroyer came on his way, bent on his errand of mischief. And they who should have guarded the hall slept all of them : Beowulf only kept watch and ward, awaiting the trial of battle. In haste the monster approached, hoping to catch some man for his prey. Many a time before had he visited King Hrothgar's hall, and never had he gone away empty. But, of a truth, he had not found it before in the keeping of so stout a warrior.

And now he was come to the hall, and straightway, at the first touch of his hands, the door,

fastened though it was with bars of iron wrought by a cunning smith, flew open. Thereafter he looked about him, with ravening eyes, whose light was like to burning fire. And as he looked he saw, fast bound in sleep, a troop of warriors, kinsmen all of them. And as he saw he laughed, thinking to himself that ere the day should dawn he would slay them all, for he deemed that fortune had favoured him again. But it was not so decreed of fate, but rather that he should not after that night make his meal again of the flesh of man.

Great was the rage in the heart of Beowulf when he saw the monster, but he held it back, waiting to see what the creature would do. Nor indeed did Grendel long delay. Speedily he seized a sleeping warrior and tore him in twain, crunching the bones with his teeth, and drinking the blood from his veins. In a trice he had devoured the body to the very feet and hands. This done, he came near to the bed of Beowulf, and stretched out to lay hold on him. But the champion seized the monster's arm with such a grip as he had never felt before. Nowhere had he found such strength in mortal man. Great was his fear and eager his desire to depart. Such grim entertainment he had not met before in King Hrothgar's hall. But Beowulf remembered what boast he had made that night, how he would carry this

work to its full accomplishment. Therefore he stood up in his place, and grappled with the monster, holding him fast, though it seemed as if his fingers would burst. And when Grendel turned to flee, then the Earl followed him. Fain would the ogre have fled to his dwelling in the moors, for he knew that the grip of a deadly foe was on him. That was in truth a rash journey that he had made to King Hrothgar's hall.

Loud were the cries of the two as they fought together, and great the terror of all that were in the hall, Danes and Goths alike. The very bravest could not hear it with an untroubled heart. Verily it was a wonder that the house itself endured such conflict ; nor had it stood but that it was cunningly set up within and without with stanchions of iron. And still Beowulf held the monster fast, with all his strength—nor, indeed, was there in any man such strength as his—for he was not minded to let so evil a thing escape. And then, for all their fear, the Earl's comrades unsheathed their swords, thinking to help their lord, and rescue him, if it might be, from his great peril. So they thought, but they knew not that not the keenest sword on earth, no, nor the stoutest battle-axe, could avail to touch that evil thing, for he had guarded himself by enchantments against all edge of steel. Nevertheless there was now come upon him a woeful end, fit recompense for one that had

wrought such woe to men. He could not by any means free himself from the strong hand-grip of the Earl. And as he strove, there came in his shoulder a great crack, and the sinews sprang apart and the joints of the bones burst asunder. Then at last he fled to his hiding-place in the moors; but he had suffered a deadly loss, for his arm he left behind him in the champion's grip.

So did Beowulf accomplish that which he had promised, delivering the hall of the Danes from the terror which had made it desolate. In token thereof he hung up high on the gable of the roof hand and arm and shoulder.

The tidings of what had befallen were soon noised abroad, and the chiefs of the Danes came from far and near to see the place and the signs of the battle. Glad of heart were they as they tracked the monster's course, seeing it red with blood, till they came to the place where he had hidden himself in his terror, knowing that his end was come, even the lake of the pixies. And when they looked on the face of the lake, they saw that it was dark with blood, the blood of Grendel. Then they rode back again in great glee, and many sang of Beowulf's mighty deed. "There is not on earth," so said they all, "among warriors that bear the shield, a champion mightier or more worthy to bear rule than he!" So they sang, yet did not fail in due honour to King

Hrothgar. Verily he was a worthy king! Then the bard, the maker of lays, after telling of the dreadful deeds of Grendel and of how Beowulf had vanquished him, sang thus :

“How shall we praise him? to whom compare?
To Sigemund, Waelson, the dragon-slayer.
Never, I trow, did braver lord
In the battle-press bear shield and sword;
And ever, where fiercest ran the tide
Of the great war-torrent, by his side
Stout Fitela stood, his sister’s son,
A stalwart comrade and true; but one,
And the dourest deed of all, alone
King Sigemund wrought, by the Dragon-stone,
Where the dreadful Worm from days of yore
Kept watch and ward o’er the treasure-store,
A fearsome beast, but the Waelsing Lord,
Nothing afraid, with his noble sword
Shore him through with so stout a blow
That the good steel sank in the earth below,
And the treasure-store of gems and gold
He stored away in his swift ship’s hold.”

So the company returned with great gladness to the town, and King Hrothgar himself came forth from his chamber, and the Queen with him, and a bevy of fair ladies in gay apparel. And when the King saw the gable of the hall, and the hand and arm of Grendel fixed upon it, he brake forth in speech, saying :

“Now let us thank Almighty God for giving us to see this sight with our eyes! Many things

have I suffered from this Grendel, and now the Lord hath wrought a wonderful deliverance. I never thought to see a remedy, for this hall evermore ran with blood, and my warriors and counsellors availed nothing to abate this woe. Yet now hath this warrior achieved our deliverance, God helping him. Happy the mother, and favoured of the Almighty, who bare such a son! And now hearken, Beowulf. I love thee as though thou wert my son; and indeed from this day forth thou shalt be as a son to me. Nothing that thou shalt desire shalt thou lack, so far as I have power to give it. And indeed I have given noble gifts and great honours to many a one who was not thy match in courage or great deeds."

Beowulf made answer to the King: "We did our work with a good heart. Only I would that thou hadst the creature himself. I thought, indeed, to have held him down in the place where I grappled him till he died. But I could not; I did not hold him fast enough. Nevertheless he left his hand, aye and his arm and shoulder also, behind him. Nor will he live one hour the longer for that he has escaped. From the deadly wound that he has suffered there is no flight."

So spake Beowulf, and there was mirth in the hall. But one man sat and spake nothing, and

he was Unferth, the son of Ecglaf. For had he not spoken scornfully of the hero?—and lo! there before his eyes and the eyes of all the nobles of the land, high up on the gable of the roof, was the hand of the monster! Like to spurs of steel were all the fingers, spurs or spikes, so keen were they and so hard. Not the most famous sword that the great smiths of old had wrought by their craft had availed to sever such a hand as the hand of Grendel.

Then King Hrothgar commanded that they should adorn the hall anew. So they adorned it with willing hands, both men and women. Grievously desolated had it been by the monster Grendel; not a part of it had escaped save the roof only, but now it was decked out with tapestries woven with threaded gold and with pictures. And when the work of adorning was finished, King Hrothgar came into the hall and sat down to the feast, and a fair company of guests, kinsmen, and nobles sat down with him. From end to end it was filled with friends, friends true at heart, for in those days no man of the Danish race cherished a thought of treachery in his heart.

Then King Hrothgar gave to Beowulf an ensign of gold on a staff richly dight, and a helmet, and a coat of mail, and a great sword from the royal treasury. Eight horses also, each

with cheek-plates of gold, did the King give him, and one of these was saddled with a saddle adorned with silver. 'Twas the King's own war-horse, on which he was wont to ride in the days when he entered into the battle. These were the gifts that King Hrothgar in true kingly wise gave to the champion Beowulf. Also he gave gifts, precious things that had come down to him as an inheritance from the kings of old, to each one of the comrades of Beowulf. And he gave also a blood-price, many pieces of gold, for him whom Grendel slew cruelly in the hall. So they sat in the hall and feasted, the King with his nobles and his guests about him, and a minstrel sang to the harp the lay of the Sons of Finn :

“To the Frisian land,
With a chosen band,
Brave sons of the Dane,
O'er the ocean plain
Did Hnaef of the race of the Scyldings go :
In the stress of battle Fate laid him low.’

And when the lay of the Sons of Finn was ended, the drawers filled up the cups and the revellers drank again. And as they drank came Elfrida the Queen, with the crown of gold upon her head. To the King she came, and said to him : “Take this beaker, my lord King, and drink, and speak comfortable words to our guests from

Gothland. Dear they are to thee, and their chief Beowulf thou wouldst gladly count for a son of thine own. And indeed thou doest well to love them, for thy hall is purged of its troubles by their means, and the years that are coming shall be years of peace. And when the time shall be for thee to depart hence, thou wilt leave thy people and thy realm to thy children after thee. And if thy sons be over young for government, then shall Hrothulf thy neighbour counsel them dutifully, remembering how we two gave him nurture in time past when he was yet but an infant." So saying, she turned to the bench where sat the two lords her sons, Hrethin and Hrothmund, and the sons of the nobles sat by them, all the youths together.

And the Queen bade Beowulf drink of the cup, and she gave into his hand chains of twisted gold, and armlets, and a mantle and rings. Never were seen jewels so precious : since Hama carried away the necklace of the Brisings, which Freia the goddess wore. And when the Queen gave him these gifts, she said : "Wear this collar, dear youth, with good fortune, and put this mantle about thy shoulders, and prosper. Make thyself fame by thy valour, and be happy as long as thou shalt live. And, I pray thee, help these my sons with counsel wise and kind. Verily thou shalt have thy reward.'

So spake the Queen, and went back to her chair. And with great joy did the company revel in the hall. And when they had enough of feasting, then they cleared away the tables and spread out the beds. So the warriors lay down to their rest, each man setting up his shield at his head, and over it his helmet, and his coat of mail, and his spear. But for one of them that lay down it was decreed of fate that he should not rise up again. But no man knows his doom, whether it shall come soon or late.

CHAPTER II

GRENDEL'S MOTHER

IN peace and confidence the warriors laid them down to sleep, but there was one among them that was doomed to pay dearly for his rest. And this was the way in which the matter came to pass. Grendel, indeed, was dead, but an avenger lived, even his mother, a troll-wife that dwelt in the moorland streams. Of savage temper was she, neither did ruth dwell in her heart, and now she was wrought to fury by the death of her son. Therefore she came to King Hrothgar's hall, and burst in upon the warriors as they slept. Great was the fear among them—not so great, of a truth, as it was when Grendel himself had come among them, for the might of a woman is not as the might of a man, but the thing troubled them much.

Now the troll-wife was in great haste, for though she was bent on avenging her son, yet she desired to escape with her life. Therefore

she was content to seize but one of the sleepers in the hall. Him she grappled with her hands, crushing him to death as he slept, and then she returned with all speed to her dwelling among the trees; but she did not forget to take away with her the hand and arm of her son. From the gable she took it down and carried it off with her.

Great was King Hrothgar's trouble when he heard of this cruel deed; for the man that had perished in this way was dearer to him than all his thanes. So he sent a messenger to Beowulf, bidding him come with all speed, for Beowulf had not slept in the hall, but a chamber had been prepared for him elsewhere, in which he might take his rest and also bestow the precious gifts which had been given him. And when he had heard from the messenger the King's desire he went, and his comrades with him. And first he said: "Hast thou slept well, O King?"

King Hrothgar made answer: "Talk not of welfare to me. *Æscher* is dead, *Æscher* who was my scribe and counsellor, aye, and the squire of my body in the old time when we stood together in the battle. And now he is dead. The destroyer has slain him in my hall, and whither the creature is gone, carrying with her the prey, I know not. Grendel thou didst slay yesterday, grappling him right manfully in

thy hands, and now this creature has avenged his death, and the bravest and best of my lords lies dead, slain by her hands.

“Now hear how I come to know that it is she that has done this deed. Often have the dwellers in the moorland seen these two. One was in the semblance of a man, only more huge than any man has been seen : this was Grendel, the same that was slain by thee ; and the other was in woman's shape. These two were wont to dwell in secret places in the wilderness. If thou wouldst know more closely the place, hearken to my words. There is a certain lake, not many miles from this hall. All about it are woods, whose great roots go down to the water. Night by night on its waters may be seen a flame, and as for its depth, no man knows what it is. A fearful place is this lake ; the stag, however sorely the hounds may have pressed him in the hunt, would sooner die than plunge his head in the water. And now it is to thee, O Beowulf, that we look for help and counsel. The place thou hast not seen, but yet, if thou darest to track this monster to her lair, go and prosper. Verily, if thou returnest again victorious, I will recompense thee with great store of treasure.’

Then said Beowulf : “Be of good comfort my lord King. ’Tis better for a man to avenge

his friend than that he should sit down and spend his time in useless lamenting. Verily for every one of us there is ordained a certain end of life ; let us therefore take such occasion as God may give us of winning renown while life still remains to us, for there is nothing better for a man than renown. Come, then, my lord King, let us go and track the path of this foul creature that is of Grendel's kindred. And this I vow. She shall not escape, nor hide herself from me ; no, neither in the bowels of the earth, nor in the secret places of the wood, nor in the depths of the sea. Have patience, then, in thy troubles, for I am assured that all will go well with thee."

Then King Hrothgar gave thanks to God for Beowulf's comfortable words, and commanded that his horse should be saddled. In stately guise he rode, and his warriors round about him. Nor was it a hard matter to follow the track of the monster. That was indeed easy to see across the moor, the evil path by which it had carried off King Hrothgar's best beloved comrade. So Beowulf and a few of his warriors with him, the stoutest and bravest of all his company, followed the track with light steps, over rocky heights, and through narrow glades, where the pixies dwelt. And of a sudden they came upon a wood. Gloomy of aspect it was, and dark the rocks on which it grew, and dreary the water that lay

beneath in its shade. A gloomy place it was, and terrible the sight, for there on the rock by the water's edge was the head of the brave man Æscher, King Hrothgar's chosen counsellor, and the lake itself seethed and bubbled with blood. Then he that bore the horn sounded, once and again, a cheering blast, and Beowulf and his company sat down and looked. Strange was the sight; great serpents and monstrous snakes of the sea at their gambols, and dragons, and many another monstrous thing. But when they heard the bugle-blast they were fain, one and all, to depart. Only Beowulf set an arrow to the string, and drew the bow and let fly the shaft. It pierced one of the monsters in a mortal part, and stayed him from his swimming for ever. Then Beowulf's comrades, with boat-poles, armed with harpoons, dragged the monster to the shore, marvelling much, so huge was he and so terrible to behold.

Then Beowulf donned his war-gear. Light of heart he was, though great was the danger. And first he put upon him his coat of mail. Well it knew how to protect the champion's body from the grip of the enemy, but now for the first time it was to make trial of the water. And so was it with the helmet that guarded his head. It also must be plunged into the deep, with its ornaments of silver, and the boar-figures, wrought of old by

the hand of some cunning smith, that were set about it, keeping it safe from all the sword-strokes of the enemy.

But of all the things that helped his valour the best was the good sword which the orator of King Hrothgar sent to him. A precious heirloom it was, and its edge was tempered with the blood of men. Never in the stress of battle had it failed the man who wielded it with undaunted hands. Nor was it now the first time that it was called to do a hero's work. Unferth, son of Ecglaf, it was who lent it to Beowulf, for he remembered no longer how he had scoffed at the champion, and indeed he knew that he lacked courage in his heart to plunge into the sea on such errand as that to which Beowulf now addressed himself.

And when the champion was now altogether ready for the fight, he said: "Remember now, my lord King, what we two have talked together. Thou hast promised that if the doom of death should overtake me in thy service, thou wouldst be in the place of a father to me. Protect, therefore, I pray thee, my kinsmen and comrades, and cause the gifts which thou hast given me to be sent to King Hygelac. So will he understand, when he sees so great a store of gold and jewels, that I had good luck while fortune favoured me. And let Unferth the orator have the sword

Hardedge, with its damasked blade, that has come down to me from my father's, and I with the sword Hrunting will either achieve high renown, or perish."

So spake the lord of the Goths, nor did he await reply, but plunged headlong into the lake. It was morning when he leapt, but the day was far spent when he reached the land that lay at the bottom of the mere. Not long was the monster in perceiving that one of the sons of men was visiting her dwelling-place for the first time in a hundred years. Swiftly she flew at him, and caught him in her talons; but for all their strength and sharpness she could not break through the coat of mail with which his body was girt about. But though she could not reach his flesh to tear it with her claws, she carried him away to the hall in which she dwelt at the bottom of the mere, nor could he, for all his strength, resist her, or wield his weapons against her. In her grip she carried him, and as he went the great water-beasts butted at him with their tusks.

The dwelling of the monster was indeed a marvellous place. Under the water it was, but the water troubled not them that were in it, for it was kept from them by the roof. Also there was a strange light in it, a light as of fire. And by this light Beowulf saw of what shape was the creature that had assailed, that it was the monster

which men had sometime seen upon the moor in the form of a woman. Straightway he dealt a great blow at her with his sword, even the mighty sword Hrunting that Unferth, the King's orator, had lent him. Mighty was the blow, but the edge of the sword could not bite. For the first time since its forging it failed its master. Oft had it dealt death in the press of battle, cleaving buckler and corslet and helmet, but now it availed nothing. In great wrath Beowulf threw away the blade. He would trust to the grip of his hands only. Thus had he vanquished Grendel, thus would he vanquish Grendel's dam.

So should a man bear himself, to work his work as best he may and have no thought of life.

Then, heedless of peril, Beowulf sprang upon Grendel's dam, and seized her by the shoulder. Full of rage he was, and he grappled the dreadful creature so mightily that she sank down upon the ground. But she was not yet overcome. No, indeed, for in her turn she grappled with him, closing in upon him, and flinging him, strongest among men though he was, upon the pavement of the floor ; for his breath failed him, and his strength was spent. Then the hag sat upon him and drew her knife, broad of blade it was and brown ; willingly would she have slain him, for she was minded to take vengeance for the death of her son. Then of a truth had Beowulf perished,

but for the coat of mail that was about his body. This the hag could not pierce ; neither with blade nor with point could she drive her knife through it. So did the Almighty Father help the champion in his need.

Then again Beowulf, with a great struggle, threw the hag from off him, and stood upright on his feet. And as he looked about the hall, he saw among the armour that was hanging about it a great sword, a weapon of giants, keen of edge, a very king among swords ; only it was so huge that none other on earth could have wielded it in the press of battle save only Beowulf the Goth. He seized it with his hands, thinking to himself, " If this avails me not, I die," and smote the beldam so fiercely on the neck that the steel shore her body right through, and she fell dead upon the pavement of the hall. And even as she fell, the light that he had seen at the first, blazed up again and showed him all the place. By the wall side he went, still holding the sword of the giants in his hand. And as he went he saw Grendel lying dead upon the floor. With his sword he cut the monster's head from his body, and so turned him to depart.

Meanwhile King Hrothgar and the Danish lords sat by the side of the mere and watched the water. And when they saw how it grew troubled, and how the surf was red with blood, they said

among themselves, "The champion will not come back, bringing victory with him. Without doubt we shall not see him any more. The she-wolf has torn him in pieces." So thinking, the King and his nobles departed. But the Goths sat still by the mere side and waited, though they were sick at heart. Greatly did they long to look upon their captain again, but there was no hope in their hearts.

But now, beyond all expectation, he came back. Nought did he take from the hall under the mere, though there were many precious things in it, and he saw them with his eyes. Only the head of Grendel he brought with him in one hand, and in the other the hilt of the giant's sword. There was nothing left of it save the hilt only, for in the blood of Grendel and of Grendel's dam there was so deadly a fire that it devoured all the blade. Glad of heart were the Goths when they saw the chief returning, and they thanked the merciful God who had delivered them from the hand of the enemy.

After this they set out to return to King Hrothgar's hall by the same way by which they had come. And in the midst of the company four stout warriors bare upon a pole the head of Grendel. And when they came to the hall, Beowulf took the head from the pole and carried it within, holding it by the hair. Truly a marvel

lous thing it was for the King and his nobles and Queen Veleda to behold. Never had any man looked on so terrible a face.

Then said Beowulf to King Hrothgar : " Hail, O King. Gladly do we bring to thee from the mere the spoils that thou seest before thee, in token that the work is done. Hardly, indeed, did I win through it with life ; in the battle beneath the water I had failed, but that the Almighty shielded me. As for the sword Hrunting I could do nothing with it, though it be a good weapon ; but by the grace of God I saw hanging upon the wall an old sword exceeding large and heavy, and He who helps men when of other help there is none, put it in my heart that I should lay hold of that weapon. And this I did, and dealt therewith to the monster a mighty and effectual blow. See now the hilt of this sword, for the blade has melted away into nothing with the blood of the monster. Now, therefore, O King, I bid thee sleep in peace, nor fear, as heretofore, any danger in the night."

So saying, he gave the hilt into the hands of the King. And when the King looked upon it he saw that there was written upon it the story of how the Flood swept away the herd of the Giants who had hardened themselves against the Ruler of the world. This was written upon it,

and also for whom the Smiths of old had wrought this marvellous work.

And when King Hrothgar had perused the hilt, he said to Beowulf: "Friend, thy fame is spread abroad throughout the world, but thou bearest it modestly and discreetly. Behave thyself so, and thou shalt be a comfort to thy people and their lords. Not so did Herenod that was King of Denmark before the days of Scyld. For did he not slay the chiefs, his comrades, at the feast? and did he not wander away alone from all companionship of man? God had given him strength and power beyond all other men, but he used them so ill that there was not one that loved him. Take thou, therefore, warning by him, O Beowulf. Sometimes God gives a man a wide dominion and great power and much prosperity. Sickness comes not near him, nor does old age bow him down, nor care trouble his heart. All his neighbours are at peace with him, and everything falls out to his mind. Then there grow up within his heart pride and arrogance; and conscience, that should keep watch in his soul against evil, falls into a deep sleep, and wicked thoughts take possession of his heart. Then he thinks to himself that his abundance is not sufficient for him; he grows covetous for himself, and grudges others their due. The end of that man is that he is overthrown and that another takes

the wealth which he has gathered. Take thou, therefore, good heed, O Beowulf, against pride and arrogancy. Now, indeed, thou art in the pride of thy strength and the power of thy age, but there will come of a surety, sooner or later, either sickness or the sword; the fire shall consume thee, or the floods swallow thee up. Be it in one fashion or another, death will subdue thee who hast so mightily subdued others. So I myself reigned for fifty years over the Danes, and had the mastery over all my enemies, so that I feared no rival from the one end of heaven to the other. Then there befell me great trouble, and I had heaviness in the place of mirth, for this Grendel came an evil guest to my hall. From this thou hast delivered me and my people, for do I not see with mine eyes the head of the enemy? And now let us come to the feast; to-morrow I have other gifts to give thee."

So they sat down to the feast, King Hrothgar and his lords, and Beowulf and his comrades. And in a while they went to their beds; right glad was Beowulf, after all his toils, to lay him down to sleep.

And now the time was come for the champion to depart. First he gave back the good sword Hrunting to Unferth the orator. "'Tis a right good sword," he said, "and will serve thee well

in war, though it availed not against the evil hag, the mother of Grendel."

To the King he said: "We now must needs return to our own land and to Hygelac our King. Thou hast used great hospitality to us and hast given us many and great gifts. If, then, there is aught else in which I can do thee service, willingly will I do it. If thy neighbours press thee hard, then will I come again, and a thousand warriors with me. And if Prince Hrethin, thy son, is minded to come as a guest to our court, verily he will find there many friends."

King Hrothgar made answer to him: "God puts into thy mouth words of wisdom, O Beowulf. Never have I heard from man so young speech so weighty. Good service hast thou done to me; and this also thou hast achieved that there shall be henceforth mutual friendship between thy heart and mine."

Then the King gave him twelve jewels from his store; and after this he threw his arms about the young man's neck, weeping the while, for he knew in his heart that he should see his face no more, and indeed he loved him no less than a father loves his son.

So Beowulf and his comrades rode down to the shore. And when the warden of the shore saw them from the peak whereon he kept his

watch, he made haste to meet them, not as heretofore with suspicion, but with greeting of welcome. "Glad am I to see you safe returning;" and he led them down to their ship where it lay on the beach. Then Beowulf gave to the warden of the boat a sword bound with gold; high place did the man hold thenceforth among his fellows by reason of this gift.

Then the Goths embarked upon their ship, and set sail; and the wind blew fair behind, stretching the canvas to the full, and the prow divided the sea-waves, throwing the foam on either side, till the men beheld the cliffs of Gothland, headlands well known to their eyes. High up on the beach was the ship driven, and the shore-warden was ready to receive it, glad to welcome his countrymen. He bade some fasten the ship with anchor-cables on either side, lest haply it should be broken by the violence of the waves; and others he commanded to bear the precious gifts, gold and jewels, to the hall of King Hygelac, for the hall was night at hand, where the King dwelt with Hygda his Queen, a gracious dame, young and fair. And one ran and told the King, saying: "Beowulf is come again, safe and sound from the battle."

So the King said, "Bring him hither to me." And they brought him, and he sat down by the King's side, and Hygda, the gracious lady, went

about the hall carrying in her hands the mead-bowl to the men of war.

Said King Hygelac : " How hast thou fared, my kinsman ? Hast thou rid King Hrothgar of his troubles ? I entreated thee, as thou knowest, to let the Danes settle their own quarrel with Grendel. But now I give thanks to God that I see thee again safe and sound."

Thereupon Beowulf told the tale of how he had grappled with Grendel in the hall, and how the monster had wrenched himself away, but with an hand and arm the less, wounded to the death ; and how he had sought for Grendel's dame in the mere among the hills and found her, and done fierce battle with her, and vanquished her, but hardly and after long struggle, and with grievous peril of his life.

And when he had ended the tale of his doings he said : " Now for these things King Hrothgar gave me many gifts and precious. To me he gave them, but I give them to thee, O King ; for indeed it was for thee I won them, and if thou art satisfied, then am I well pleased."

Then he bade his comrades bring into the hall a helmet with a crest that towered in the press of battle, and a coat of mail, and a mighty sword. " This," he said, " King Hrothgar gave me, having had it from his fathers before him." Also he gave to the King four noble steeds, so like

that none could tell the one from the other. And to Hygda he gave a jewel marvellously wrought that Queen Veleða had bestowed upon him, and three palfreys, gaily caparisoned.

After this King Hygelac bade them bring the great sword, mounted in gold, that had belonged to King Hrethet, his father. In all Gothland there was not a treasure of greater account than the sword of King Hrethet. And he gave him also a great revenue in money, and a stately dwelling, and a high place among his lords.

Now it came to pass as time went on that King Hygelac made war against the men of Friesland, and he took with him a great host and many famous chiefs, of whom Beowulf was the greatest. But the men of Friesland had made alliance with the Chatti and with others of the nations round about; and the battle went against King Hygelac and the Goths, and the King was slain and all his nobles with him, save Beowulf only. He, indeed, when the enemy pressed him hard, leapt into the sea. Thirty sets of war-harness had he on his arm when he leapt. Small cause had the Chatti to rejoice that day, seeing that few only of their host escaped from the sword of Beowulf to go back to their home. So the champion escaped by swimming, and came back to Gothland lonely and sad of heart. Then Queen Hygda would

have had him take the throne to himself, for her son was but of tender years and she feared that he would not have strength to guard the realm against the assaults of the enemy. But she did not prevail with Beowulf, no, nor did the nobles of the land, when they joined with her in her prayers. "Nay," said Beowulf, "but I will keep the kingdom for the boy till he become of years to keep it for himself." So he kept it faithfully and with a prudent soul. But after a while there came to the court of King Heardred—he was Hygelac's son—two outlawed men, sons of Ohthere the Swede, who had rebelled against their lord the King of Sweden. Heardred showed them hospitality, but they for recompense slew him with the sword. And now, their King being dead, the nobles took counsel together, and came to Beowulf saying, "There is now none who can be King over the Goths save thou only." So Beowulf consented to their desire, and took the kingdom upon himself, ruling the people prudently for fifty years. Well did he avenge the death of Hygelac and his son. But the tale of how he also came to his end yet remains to be told.

CHAPTER III

THE DRAGON

IN old time there was a band of comrades who had gathered together in many adventures both by land and sea a great store of precious things—tankards and drinking cups, and armour inlaid with gold, helmets, to wit, and coats of mail, with famous swords wrought by cunning smiths of yore and richly adorned. Now it came to pass that these men, as the years went on, were slain in battle, till at last one only of them was left alive. This man took the treasure and hid it away. In a barrow he hid it wherein some famous chief of the old time had been buried. Close to the sea was the barrow, rising sheer from the cliff. The man laid it open even to the chamber of the dead, and there he stored the precious things, rejoicing his eyes for a while with the sight of them. “Hold thou, O earth,” he said, “that which mighty men have not been able to hold. They have passed away, the men,

my peers, and I only am left alive. There is none but I to gird upon him the sword, or to furbish the tankard and the drinking-cup. The helmet that has borne many a blow must perish, and the stout coat of mail and the shield that were proof against the bite of the sword must decay even as the warrior that bore them in the battle." Thus did the last of that valorous company lament over his treasures, until the time came when he also was overtaken by death.

It chanced that one of the dragons that haunt the barrows, the burial-places of the dead, lighted upon the place and saw the treasure, for it was open to the sky. And the creature took possession of it and guarded it, for such it is their delight to do. For three hundred years he watched it, nor was ever disturbed. But at the end of the three hundred years there befell this thing. A certain man had come into ill-favour with his lord, and, fearing stripes for his misdeeds, had fled into a desert place uninhabited by man. Then he chanced to come upon this hoard. Not without fear did he see the treasure, for chances so great and wonderful strike with a certain terror the hearts of those whom they befall. But he thought to himself: "If I stay here, I perish. I will take, therefore, one of these precious things, and therewith will I reconcile myself to my lord." This he did;

he took from the hoard a tankard bossed with gold, and gave it to his lord as a peace-offering, and the lord was entreated of the man, and restored to him his favour.

Now all this time the Worm was asleep in an inner chamber of the mound. And when the creature woke he discovered the deed that had been done, to wit, that the treasure had been disturbed. So he issued from the mound and searched diligently every place round about, if haply he might find the man who had done it. But no one could he see. Then once and again he went back and examined the hoard, counting over the precious things, till at last he knew for certain that some one had plundered it. Great was his anger, and scarce could he endure to tarry till night before he began to take vengeance for this wrong. But when the darkness fell he went forth and wasted all the land with fire. Night after night he issued from the barrow and flew abroad, carrying desolation with him. He caused houses and farmsteads to blaze up, and spread ruin far and wide. When the day came he returned to his dwelling in the barrow, but every night he went abroad to destroy.

Tidings came to King Beowulf himself that his hall, which the people of the Goths had given him for his own, had been burnt with fire. Great was the wrath in his heart when

he heard it, so great that he was well-nigh ready to murmur against God in his heart, though this was not the good King's wont. Then he began to question how this trouble had its beginning, and discovered how that a certain man had found out the hoard and had taken therefrom a tankard for a gift to his lord. Now he scorned to go against the destroyer with a great host of men, nor did he fear the creature for himself. His valour and his strength had borne him safely through many perils by land and sea since the days of the slaying of Grendel and Grendel's dam, nor did he fear that they would fail him now. It was his purpose that twelve men should go for the accomplishment of the deed, he being himself the twelfth. But there was yet a thirteenth in the company—the man who in the beginning had brought about the strife. Him the King compelled, sore against the man's will, to be their guide. Rueful he went and by constraint, leading them by the way till they came to the mound, where it stood alone hard by the waves of the sea.

And when they were come to the place the King sat him down, and spake to his comrades. Sad of heart he was, for he knew that his end was near. "Many a fight, my friends," he said, "have I fought from my youth up. Seven years old I was when my father brought me hither to

serve King Hrethin. And the King showed much kindness to me, giving me money and victual; not less dear was I to him than any page in his house, not less even than Herebald and Haethcyn his sons. Then there came trouble into his household, for it came to pass by an ill-chance that Haethcyn slew his brother Herebald. With an arrow he slew him, for he aimed at a target and the arrow glanced wide and smote the prince. Thence came a great sorrow and not to be healed to King Hrethin. He could not avenge the deed upon the doer of it. That might not be, for was he not his own son and the thing done by an evil chance? Nor yet could he keep any love for him in his heart. For this grief, therefore, there was no remedy. It wounded the old man to the death. He laid him down on his bed, and passed from the darkness of life to the light of God. After this there was war between the men of Gothland and the Swedes. The Swedish King and his sons provoked it, and King Haethcyn marched into their borders to avenge the wrong. Sore was the battle that day, and the King was slain; aye, and the whole host of the Goths had perished but for the coming of Hygelac. So Hygelac was called to be King, and him I served in many a battle. No need had he to call champions from other lands or bribe them with

pay while I was at hand. Many a chief have I slain with this good sword, and one, the Prince of the Hugas, with my bare hand only. No weapon had I, but I crushed him with my arms, and brake his bones. Such deeds, my friends, have I done in time past, and yet one more will I do, if only the destroyer will come out of his dwelling to meet me in battle."

When his speech was ended he bade farewell to each of his comrades man by man, and when he had ended his words he said: "Even as I did in the old time with Grendel, so I would now with this Worm; I would not use sword or other weapon. But I know not how without these I could hold out against him. Likewise, as I must encounter fire, venomous and deadly, when I grapple with him, so I must also carry shield and coat of mail. Thus will I go prepared, but not one foot's space will I yield to him. On this mound will we fight, and meet such end as He who orders all things shall decree. But enough of words; I desire above all things to meet this destroyer without more delay. Do ye, my comrades, abide here in the mountain, with your coats of mail about you, to see which of us twain shall have the better hope to come victorious out of this fray. But to grapple with the monster is not for you or for any man, but for me only. One of these two things must be: either I

will carry away this treasure, or death shall take me."

Then he rose up from his place. With helmet on head and clad in coat of mail he went his way among the cliffs till he beheld an arch of rock, and beneath it a barrow, and a stream breaking forth from the barrow, and all the face of the stream was alight with flame. And when Beowulf saw these things he stood and shouted aloud. Clear as a battle-cry was the shout, and it reached to the dragon where he lay in the depth of the barrow. And when he heard it he knew that it was the speech of man, and that the time for battle was come. So he rose from his place and before him there went a hot stream of reeking breath, that was, as it were, a defiance of his enemy. Then the King of the Goths swung his shield against his adversary, and drew his sword, a famous weapon that had come to him by inheritance from his ancestors in days gone by. So the two stood over against each other, and there was fear in the heart of both. Steadfast stood the King with his shield before him on the one side, and on the other was the Worm, curved into a bow, in act to spring. Quickly he sprang, throwing himself with headlong force against the King. So mighty was the attack that the shield availed not to keep him away. And when the King swung his great sword and smote the Worm, then

the edge was turned upon the bony covering of the beast, nor availed to give such a wound as had served the need of the King. For now was Beowulf in a great strait. Fierce beyond measure was the Worm's assault, and a devouring fire came forth from him without ceasing.

Thus it fared with them in their first grapple and in the second also. And the King was sore distressed. And as for his comrades, nobles though they were, they stood not behind him, but slunk away into the wood, for they feared for their lives, lest the Worm should slay them with his breath of fire. So they fled, Beowulf's comrades, who, by right, should have stood by their lord. One only remained faithful and steadfast. He was Wiglaf, son of Weopstan, a lord from the land of the Swedes. For he remembered how, in days that were past, Beowulf had given him a homestead well furnished and a place among his lords, all that Weopstan his father had enjoyed before him. This was in Wiglaf's heart, nor could he endure to desert his lord; and indeed now for the first time had he been called to stand by him in the battle. His courage failed not, nor the good sword which he bore, Weopstan's sword which he had won, in single fight, from Earmund, son of Othere the Swede.

Said Wiglaf to his comrades: "I remember, my friends, how, when we sat at the mead in the

King's hall, we promised our lord that we would repay him for his bounty, should ever the need arise, with our helmets and our keen-edged swords. Did he not, for this cause, choose us out of all his host to be with him, as being brave warriors and good at need? Great deeds had he wrought in old time with his single hand, but of this deed he willed to give us a share. And now the time is come when we may show our valour and our strength. Let us go and help our chief where the scorching fire of the great Worm's breath is burning him. As for me, God knows that I had sooner be consumed with this same fire, than that I should leave him to perish. Foul shame it were that we should carry back our shields to our home, unless we can first destroy our enemy and save the King alive. Not such, I trow, was the wont of the Goths in old time to leave their lord to bear the battle-stress alone. We must pay our lord for sword and helmet and coat of mail and all the ornaments ; aye, and so will I do, though it should befall that we both die together."

So he spake to his comrades, but moved them not. Then alone he sped through the deadly smoke and fire, and stood by the side of the King, and said : " My lord Beowulf, now is the time for thee to make good thy words, that never, being alive, wouldst thou suffer thy glory to decline. Put out all thy strength, and

fight for thy life, and I will give thee such help as I may."

So soon as he had ended these words, the Worm came on again with great fury, all flaming with fire. So fierce was the heat that the shield was consumed even to the boss. Nor could the coat of mail protect him. Under his lord's shield did Wiglaf shelter himself when that his own was in ashes. Then Beowulf remembered his strength and smote with all his might. Full on the head with mighty blow he smote the Worm. But Naegling his sword flew in splinters, good weapon though it was and famed in story. It failed him, indeed, nor yet of its own defect. So strong was the champion's arm that is overtaxed all swords whatsoever. Let the edge be keen beyond all nature, yet it failed when Beowulf struck with all his strength.

Then for the third time the Worm came on, the fiery monster, wrought to rage beyond all bearing. For a space the King fell back, and the Worm seized his neck, compassing it round with savage teeth so that the blood of his life gushed out in a great stream.

And now the youth Wiglaf put forth all the valour and strength that were in him to help his kinsman the King. He heeded not the fire, though grievously it scorched his hand, but smote the Worm underneath, where the skin failed some-

what in hardness. He drove the good sword into the monster's body, and straightway the fire began to abate. Then the King recovered himself somewhat and drew his war-knife, keen of edge, that he wore upon his coat of mail, and gashed the Worm in the middle. So these two together subdued the monstrous inhabitant of the barrow.

But now Beowulf perceived that a fatal mischief was at work, for the wound began to swell and to grow hot, and he felt the poison of the Worm's teeth in his inward parts. He sat him down upon a stone and looked at the barrow with its chamber cunningly wrought. Wiglaf meanwhile fetched water from a stream hard by, and poured it upon his lord to refresh him, and loosened the chain of his helmet. Then, though his wound pressed him sore, and he knew that the number of his days was told, Beowulf spake to his faithful follower : "Now would I have given my war-gear to my son, if God had granted me a son that should have my kingdom after me. But it has pleased Him otherwise. Fifty years have I ruled over this people, nor has any ruler of the nations round about dared to cross my borders with hostile purpose. I have done judgment and justice ; I have done no treachery nor sought out strife ; the oaths that I have sworn, these I have kept. And now I pray thee, Wiglaf, to go and examine this treasure. For the Worm lies dead, and that which

he guarded so long is his no more. Go quickly then, for I would fain see the treasure before I die. With better content shall I depart, if I see how great are the riches which I have won."

So Wiglaf, son of Weopstan, made haste to do as his lord had bidden him. Into the barrow he went, clad in his coat of mail. Many precious things did he there behold, great jewels, and vessels of gold, and helmets richly chased, and bracelets. And of all the treasure the most wonderful was a banner of gold, woven by art of magic, for there came from it a great light, making all things clear to be seen in the chamber. All this treasure, cups and platters, and the great banner itself did Wiglaf take in his arms, and made haste to return therewith to the King, doubting much whether he should find him yet alive. He lived indeed, but was in extremity at the very point to die. Then Wiglaf sprinkled him again with water, and caused him to revive, so that he spake again with his lips : " Now do I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast suffered me to look upon this treasure with my eyes, aye, and to win such riches for my people before I die. For surely now my time is come, and I can serve this people no more. Bid my brave warriors, O Wiglaf, to build a lofty cairn for me, hard by the sea, when my body shall have been burnt with fire. Surely it shall be my memorial for

ever, and whoever comes across the sea, they shall say, beholding it, 'This is the barrow of Beowulf, King of the Goths.'"

Then the King took the golden collar from off his neck and gave it to Wiglaf; also his helmet he gave, and the crown upon his head, and his coat of mail. "Keep them faithfully," he said, "for, indeed, I am the last of my house. Death has taken all my kinsmen into his keeping, and now I must needs follow them." So spake the old King, and straightway he breathed out his soul.

And now the ten laggards came forth from the wood wherein they had sheltered themselves, the base ones who had not dared to stand by their lord. Shamefaced they came to the place where Wiglaf sate, still seeking, if it might be, to bring back the King, his master, to life. But that fate forbade. The old man had ended his days. Said Wiglaf to the ten: "Now might a man say well and truly that he who gave helmet and coat of mail to such as you wasted them utterly. For when the need of help came upon him, he found them lacking. Single-handed he did battle with the enemy, and single-handed, God helping him, he prevailed. Little help could I give him, yet I smote the Worm with my sword and somewhat abated thereby his fiery breath. But at the moment of his greatest need he lacked defence. Therefore it is fitting that ye and all your kin

should forfeit land and wealth and gear of war, and wander outcast through the land, fitter to die than to live."

When he had thus spoken the doom of the cowards, he sent a messenger to the people where they waited for tidings by the hall. "King Beowulf is dead," said the messenger to the host, "done to death by the Worm, and by him sits Wiglaf, son of Weopstan. Verily it is an evil thing that has befallen this land and its people. For we have enemies on every side, Hugas and Swedes and Frisians, and now that our champion is fallen they will speedily assail us. But come and see him where he lies, and the great Worm also whom he slew."

So the host arose and followed him, weeping many tears till they came to the place. There they saw lying dead upon the ground the great King Beowulf. There also they saw the Worm. Never, I trow, did the eyes of men look on a sight more terrible. Fifty feet long was the Worm, by measurement, and all its length was scorched with fire; and by it lay a store of precious things, pots and bowls and dishes and swords of price, and the rust and mould of many years was on them, so long had they lain hidden in the earth.

Then Wiglaf, the son of Weopstan, spoke, saying: "We could not persuade our dear lord, the shepherd of the people, to leave the Worm

alone and the treasure which he guarded. He was bent on the deed, and now the hoard, purchased at so great a price, lies open to our view. I have seen the whole sum of it where it lies in the midst of the barrow, for I made my way thither, not without toil and pain. I grappled in my hands a great load of treasure therefrom, and bare it in haste to the King. He, indeed, was yet alive, nor was his mind confused with death. He bade me gave you his greeting, and he commanded that when his body had been burnt with fire, ye should raise a great barrow over him, mighty as he was mighty, to be for a memorial of him for the generations to come. Now, therefore, come and see once again the great sight that is beneath the earth, jewels and gold and ornaments of precious things. And, after this, let us make ready a bier, and let us carry our dear lord the King to the place wherein he shall rest in the keeping of God."

When he had thus spoken Wiglaf gave command that much timber should be hauled to make the pile for the burning of the King. Also he chose seven warriors, men of fame among the people, who should go with him, he being the eighth, into the chamber where lay the treasure. Each man bare in his hand a flaming torch, and Wiglaf walked before them, leading them. So they came to the treasure and carried it

forth ; a waggon load there was of precious things.

This done, the lords of the Goths built up a mighty pyre upon the earth, hanging it about with helmets and shields and coats of mail, even as Beowulf had commanded ; and in the midst, with many sighs, they laid their dear lord the King. Then they kindled the fire, and the smoke of the fire rose high into the air, and the blaze shot up, and the winds made the burning wave fiercer and fiercer till the whole was utterly consumed.

After this the people built a great barrow on the hill. High it was and broad, and such as they that travel on the sea could see for many a mile. For days they laboured to make it great and high. And round the barrow they made a great embankment in such fashion as they that are wise in such matters command. And in the barrow they hid the treasure, thinking it meet that it should not profit the generations that were to come any more than it had profited the generations that had been.

And when all these things were ended, twelve war-chiefs, men of royal race all of them, rode round the barrow making lamentation for the dead King, and praising him for all the noble deeds that he had done, and for that he was of all the kings on earth the gentlest and most courteous, but withal a great lover of praise and glory.

*KING ARTHUR
AND THE ROUND TABLE*

CHAPTER I

HOW ARTHUR CAME TO HIS KINGDOM

KING U^THER, surnamed Pendragon, for a reason that he had delivered Arthur, his newly born son, to Merlin the wizard, and Merlin put the child in charge of a certain Sir Ector and his wife. Sir Ector's wife nourished him even as if he were her own babe, and Arthur grew apace and prospered.

When he was some two years old King Uther fell sick, and while he was in his sickness his enemies came against him and slew many of his people. Said Merlin to him, "Sir, you will never have the better of these men unless you meet them in your own person, though you be carried in a litter. Then you shall prevail." And so it was done: King Uther was carried in a litter, and at St. Alban's he met the King of the North with his host, and put him to flight. This done, he went back to London with much rejoicing. But his sickness increased upon him till he became speechless. The nobles then

inquired of Merlin what they should do. Merlin answered : " For the King's sickness there is no remedy ; but see to this, that all his barons be present with him on the morrow. Then I will make him speak." So on the morrow, all the barons being present, Merlin said to the King, " Sir, shall Arthur, your son, be King after you?" Then King Uther turned him and said, " Yes, he shall have the kingdom, and my blessing therewith," and having so spoken he died.

After this there was trouble in the land, many desiring the kingdom for themselves. Merlin said to the Archbishop, " Bid all the lords of the realm meet at Christmastide in London, for then I will show by a miracle who has the kingdom by right." So the lords met at London, and went to St. Paul's church to pray. And when they had ended their prayers, there was seen in the churchyard a great stone, four-square, and on the stone an anvil of steel, and in the anvil a naked sword, whereon was written in letters of gold, " Whoso shall pull this sword out of the anvil, he is King of England by right." Then many lords that had thought to have the kingdom tried with all their might to draw the sword out of its place, but could not. Then said the Archbishop : " He is not here that shall draw this sword, but doubtless God will show him in due time.

Let us therefore set ten knights to watch this place." And so it was done. On the first day of the New Year there was held a great joust and tournament, and to this joust went Sir Ector, who had fostered Arthur, and Sir Kaye, who was Sir Ector's eldest son, and Arthur. As they rode to the place, it chanced that Sir Kaye missed his sword, which he had left behind him in his father's lodgings. So he said to Arthur his brother, "I pray you fetch me my sword." "That will I gladly," said Arthur, and rode fast to Sir Ector's lodging. But he could not get at the sword, for that all were gone to the jousting. Then Arthur was wroth and said, "I will take the sword that is in the churchyard, for my brother Kaye must not lack his weapon." So he rode to the churchyard, and there also all the knights had gone to the jousting. So he took the sword by the handle, none hindering, and pulled it, and it followed his hand lightly. Then he rode back and gave it to Sir Kaye; and when Sir Kaye saw it, he knew it for the sword that was in the anvil of steel. So he rode to his father and said, "See this sword: now shall I be King." But Sir Ector rode back to the church, his sons following. And being come thither, he made Sir Kaye swear by the Gospels how he had gotten the sword. "I got it from my brother Arthur," said Sir Kaye. Then said Sir Ector to Arthur, "How got you this sword?"

He made answer, "I was seeking a sword for my brother Kaye, and could find none but this, so I pulled it from the stone." Then said Sir Ector to Arthur, "You must be King of this land." "For what cause?" said Arthur. "Because God will have it so. But first put the sword back into its place." "That needs no pains," said Arthur, and put it in its place. But when Sir Ector would have drawn it forth again he could do nothing; neither could Sir Kaye; but when Arthur essayed, he pulled it forth right easily.

Then Sir Ector and Sir Kaye kneeled on the earth. And Arthur said, "Dear father and brother, why kneel you to me?" "Nay," answered Sir Ector, "I am not your father, nor are you of my blood. And now I see that you are of higher blood than I thought." And so he told him the story of his bringing up; and having ended, he said, "Will you show kindness to me and mine when you are King?" "I were base did I not so," said Arthur, "for the kindness that you have done to me all my life. Ask me what you will, and I will not fail." "I ask you this," said Sir Ector, "that you make Kaye my son seneschal of all your lands." "That shall he be," answered Arthur, "so long as he and I shall live."

Then they told the Archbishop how Arthur had won the sword. And the Archbishop called all

the lords together. All essayed to draw forth the sword, but only Arthur could do it. But they said, "Shall we be governed by a beardless boy, who comes we know not whence?" So they put the matter off to Candlemas, and from Candlemas to Easter, and from Easter to Pentecost.

At Pentecost the Archbishop, by counsel of Merlin, had gathered some stout knights that should be of Arthur's part. Then again many made trial of the sword, but Arthur only could draw it forth. Thereupon all the commons cried aloud, "We will have Arthur to our King, and any man that hinders we will slay." So the lords knelt down and prayed pardon that they had so long delayed. So Arthur forgave them. After this he offered up the sword at the altar, and the best man that was there gave him knighthood. This done, the Archbishop set the crown upon his head, and he swore to do judgment and justice as a king should do all the days of his life.

For the space of a year King Arthur set himself with all his might to set in due order all that had gone amiss since the death of King Uther. He made the rebel lords to do him homage, and them that had been wrongfully dispossessed of their lands he brought back to their own.

At the Pentecost after his encrowning he made a great feast at the city of Caerleon, to which he called the kings of the country round about.

They came each with many knights, and the King was glad, thinking that they had come out of love for him and to do him honour, and he sent them great gifts. But these they refused with one consent, saying : " Who is this beardless boy and baseborn also that he should give us gifts. He shall have gifts of us, hard blows and nought beside." When he had this answer, King Arthur, by counsel of his friends, shut himself up in a strong castle with five hundred knights, and there the barons besieged him.

About fifteen days thereafter Merlin came into the camp of the kings. They asked him, " Who is this boy that pretends to be King ? " Merlin answered, " He is son to King Uther, and your sovereign by right. Yea, before he dies he shall have England and Wales and Scotland and Ireland under his dominion, and other realms beside." Thereat some of the kings marvelled ; others laughed him to scorn ; others said that he was a wizard. Yet they agreed that Arthur should come out under safe conduct and speak with them. So he came out, but it profited nothing ; they spake but hard words to each other. " I will make you bow to me," said Arthur. Merlin counselled the kings ; " You shall not prevail against him, how many soever you be." But Lot, that was King of Orkney, answered, " We will not take counsel of a dreamer

of dreams." Thereupon Merlin vanished out of their sight, and coming to King Arthur, said, "Set on them with all your might." So the King rode against them, and as he rode three hundred of the best among them came over to him. But Merlin said to him, before the battle was joined, "Use not the sword that you had from the anvil till things be come to the worst. Then draw it and strike with all your might."

Thereupon was a fierce battle, wherein Arthur did such deeds of arms that his very enemies praised him. He fought in the front ranks till his horse was slain under him, and he himself smitten to the ground by King Lot. But his knights raised him up and set him again on a horse. Thereupon he drew the sword that he had from the anvil, which flashed with a light as of thirty torches, so that the enemy were confounded. The commons of Caerleon also came with staves and clubs and slew many knights. Then as many of the enemy as were left turned their backs and fled.

Yet it was not easily that Arthur came to his kingdom. For these same kings gathered together a yet larger host and hindered him. But by Merlin's counsel he made alliance with Ban, that was King of Benwicke, and Bors, that was King of Gaul, than whom there were no stouter knights in those days. Merlin also by his magic caused

ten thousand men well armed and well provided in all things to be carried across the sea and by secret ways to the place where the King was in a marvellously short space of time.

It were long to tell how the hosts fought together, for King Lot and his fellows were stout men-at-arms, and held their own manfully, but yet could not stand against King Arthur and his lords. Great was the slaughter, till at the last Merlin said to the King, "Will you never have done? Of three-score thousand men ye have left but fifteen thousand alive. It is time that you should hold your hand, for you cannot altogether destroy these kings at this time, and if you will be for pursuing them yet further, then will fortune turn against you and go with them. Withdraw then to your lodging, and reward your knights with gold and silver, for they have well deserved it. As to the spoil that you have won in the battle, my counsel is that you give it to the two Kings Ban and Bors. For your own lords and knights, you have enough of your own."

So Merlin counselled, and King Arthur did so. The spoil of battle he gave to the two kings, who divided it straightway among their knights, and to his own people he divided out of his own substance.

Thus at last was Arthur established in his kingdom.

CHAPTER II

OF EXCALIBUR AND THE ROUND TABLE

GREAT was the feasting on occasion of Arthur's settlement in his kingdom, and it came to pass on a day, when the feasting was ended, that there came to the palace a squire bearing on his horse a knight that had been wounded to the death. When they inquired what had befallen him, he said, "There is a knight that hath set up his pavilion in the forest hard by, and constrains all that pass to joust with him. This man hath slain my master ; give me, therefore, a knight who will take up my quarrel." Thereupon there rose up one Giflet, a squire. He was but young, being of an age with the King, but he had done good service in the wars. "Let me take up this quarrel," said he. "Nay," answered the King, "thou art over young." Nevertheless, as Giflet was urgent with his demand, the King suffered him to go, having first made him a knight. So Sir Giflet rode into the forest, and coming to the

strange knight's pavilion, struck with his spear on the shield that hung thereby. Then came out the knight, and after some parley, for the knight of the pavilion was loath to fight with the young man, they jousted together, and Sir Giflet was borne to the earth, well nigh wounded to death. But the strange knight unlaced his helmet, and set him on his horse, and sent him to the court, where he was healed of his wound, not without much pains of the physicians.

But when the King saw Sir Giflet come back grievously wounded, he was very wroth, and bade one that waited on him in his chamber to be ready for him without the city on the morrow with his armour and the best horse that he had. So on the morrow, before it was day, he armed himself, and mounted his horse, and so rode into the forest. On his way he saw Merlin flying from three churls who made as though they would have slain him. But when the King cried to them with a loud voice that they should flee, they left pursuing Merlin, and departed. Said the King, "Merlin, thou hadst been slain for all thy craft but for me." "Nay, my lord," answered Merlin, "I could have saved myself had I so willed. But you, on the journey you are taking, are nearer to death than I." But as they talked they came to a pavilion, and a knight sitting thereby in a chair, fully armed. "Sir knight,"

said the King, "are you he that will suffer none to pass this way, except he first joust with you. I counsel you to leave this custom." The knight made answer: "This custom have I kept, and will keep: if it please you not, you can change it." "That will I," said the King. Then they jousted together, and smote each man the other's shield so hard that both their spears were broken. Then the King drew his sword. "Nay," said the knight, "we will have another joust with spears," "Willingly," answered the King, "had I another spear." "I have spears enough," said the knight. So they jousted again, and brake their spears again. "You are a passing good knight," said the stranger; "now for the honour of knighthood, let us joust yet once more." So they jousted the third time, and now the King and his horse were overthrown. The King was very wroth to suffer such mishap, and drew his sword, saying, "I will fight on foot." Which when the stranger knight heard, he also lighted from his horse, for he would not have his adversary at a disadvantage. So they set to with their swords, and fought as sore a battle as did ever two knights. At the last it chanced that their swords met together with a full stroke, and the knight's sword cleft the King's in two pieces. "Now yield," said the knight, "as recreant, or you die." "Nay," said the King, "I will not refuse to die,

but yield me as recreant I will not." And so saying he took the knight by the middle and flung him to the earth. But the knight anon recovered himself, and being a man of passing great strength, wrestled with the King so mightily that he brought him under, and would have smitten off his head.

Now Merlin was hard by, though the two saw him not. He cried to the strange knight, "Hurt not this man, lest thou put this realm to more damage than ever realm had before, for this man is of more honour than you know." "Who is he?" said the knight. Merlin answered, "He is King Arthur," which when the knight heard he would fain have slain the King, fearing his vengeance. But Merlin cast him into a deep sleep by his enchantments. When the King saw him lie as though he were dead, he was greatly troubled. "What have you done?" said he; "have you slain this knight by your enchantments? Verily I would give all my lands for a whole year if he might live again." "Trouble not yourself," said Merlin, "he is more whole than you. For he is but asleep, and will awake three hours hence. But did I not tell you what a stout knight he was? If you saved me from the knaves, much more did I save you from him. But know that this knight is King Pellennore, and that he and his two sons will do you good service hereafter."

Then Merlin and the King rode on till they came to a hermitage wherein dwelt a holy man, that was also a very skilful physician. This man sought out all the King's hurts, and gave him healing salves for them, and shortly made him sound of body. So the two departed, and as they rode Arthur said, "I have no sword." "You shall have a noble sword right soon," answered Merlin. So they rode on till they came to a fair lake, and when the King looked on the face of the lake, he was aware of an arm in the midst of it that was clothed in white samite, that is to say, silk of six threads woven with gold, and held a sword by the handle. "Look you," said Merlin, "that is the sword that you shall have." Then, as they looked, they saw a damsel that came towards them upon the face of the lake. "Who is this damsel?" said the King. Merlin made answer, "She is the Lady of the Lake, and if you speak her fair, she will give you this sword." Then the damsel, coming to the King, saluted him. "Fair damsel," said he, "what is that sword that I see? Fain would I have it for my own, for I have no sword." The damsel answered, "Sir King, the sword is mine, but I will give it to you willingly, if you, on your part, will give me a gift when I shall ask it." Then the King promised on his word that he would give her such a gift as she should desire. Then she said, "Go to yonder

barge, and row yourself to the place where you see the arm, and take the sword and the scabbard." So King Arthur and Merlin tied their horses to two trees, and took the barge and rowed to the place where the arm was. And the King took the sword by the handle, and when he had taken it the arm went under the water and was seen no more. Then the King returned to Caerleon. Right glad were his knights to see him return safe and sound. And when they heard his adventures, they said among themselves, "This is a right worthy King, who puts himself into peril as though he were but the poorest knight." And they obeyed him thenceforth the more willingly.

After this there came tidings to the King that one Leodegrance, who held a kingdom under him, was sore pressed by King Rience of North Wales. This Rience had caused a mantle to be made which had for a hem the beards of kings. Eleven beards there were, and there was yet one place empty. So Rience sent to King Arthur saying, "Give me your beard for the place that is empty in the hem of my mantle." Right glad was the King to find occasion to chastise this insolent knave. Therefore he the more willingly marched to the help of King Leodegrance, and put King Rience to flight, and slew many of his people.

This adventure of King Arthur in ridding Leodegrance of his enemies was the cause of his getting for himself a wife. His barons had counselled him to marry, and Leodegrance had a daughter, Guinevere by name, that was passing fair, and when Arthur saw her he loved her with all his heart, saying to himself, "This shall be my wife."

So he said to Merlin, "My barons will have me marry. Now what is your counsel?" Merlin answered, "They counsel well. Is there any damsel on whom your heart is set?" "Yes," said the King, "there is even Guinevere, the daughter of King Leodegrance." "Then," said Merlin, "if your heart is set on her, counsel is idle, be it of the wisest man upon earth." "You speak truth," answered the King. Nevertheless Merlin warned him privately that this marriage should not be to his good, but the King would not hearken to him. Thereupon Merlin went to Cameliard, where King Leodegrance dwelt, and told him what Arthur desired. "There is nothing," said the King, "that I could hear with more pleasure than that so brave a knight should desire to wed my daughter. Right willingly will I give her to him. Lands also and gold in plenty would I give with her as her dowry, but that I know he has enough of both. Yet there is one thing that he will gladly receive at my hands,

and that is the Round Table, which his father, Uther Pendragon, gave me in old time. One hundred and fifty knights may have their seats about it, so great is it. I have myself one hundred knights that are waiting to sit at it; let Arthur himself fill up the number with knights of his own."

So when all things needful had been made ready, Merlin set forth to return to London, where King Arthur then was, taking with him Guinevere and the Round Table and the hundred knights. The King received this royal gift with great pleasure. "This fair lady is welcome indeed," he said, "for I have loved her long; and as for the Table and the knights, I prize them above all the gold and the lands that are in all the world, for there is nothing better than honour and valour."

Then he said to Merlin, "Go, find me fifty knights that I may put them in the seats that are empty at the Table." So Merlin went, but the fifty he could not find. Only twenty-eight did he deem worthy of so great an honour. This done, the Archbishop of Canterbury came and blessed the Table and the seats, and put the knights in their places. After this, at Merlin's bidding, all the knights rose up and did homage to the King, and when they had risen, there was found in each man's place his proper style and name.

But two seats were seen to be empty. "How is this?" said the King. "These two," Merlin answered, "are for the two noblest knights in all the world. And next to these two is the Perilous Seat, wherein no man can sit but one, and whosoever else shall seek to sit therein shall perish."

The same day there came to the King a son of King Lot of Orkney, Gawaine by name, a handsome squire, who asked the King a boon, that he would make him a knight on the day of his marriage. "That will I do right willingly?" answered the King, "especially because you are my sister's son," for one of King Arthur's sisters was married to Lot.

Next after Gawaine came a poor husbandman bringing with him a fair youth of eighteen years or thereabouts. He said to the King, "Sire, men say that you will give on your marriage day any boon that is within reason." "That is so," answered the King. "Then I pray you," answered the husbandman, "to make this my son a knight. "Nay," answered the King, "but that is scarce within reason. Who are you? why ask you this great honour? And what hath the lad done?" The husbandman replied, "I am but a cowherd, and I have thirteen sons, good lads to work, all of them. But this who is the eldest will do nothing, caring for nothing but such sports as soldiers use, and to

look on knights jousting and the like." The King asked the lad of his name. "My name is Tor," said he. Then the King seeing that he was fair of face, and of good stature, and strong of body, said, "Have you a sword?" "That I have," said the lad. "Then draw it and make your request to be made a knight." So the lad leapt down from his horse, for he was riding on a lean and sorry creature, and knelt down before the King, and the King made him a knight. Then Sir Tor asked, "May I be of the Round Table?" "That," answered the King, "is for such as are tried. Show yourself worthy, and you shall sit there in due time." This done, he turned to Merlin and asked, "Will Sir Tor make a good knight?" "That will he," answered Merlin, "and by right, for he is in truth the son of King Pellennore." Now King Pellennore was the knight of the pavilion, who had smitten Arthur to the ground on the day when he got his sword Excalibur.

The next day King Pellennore himself came to the court. And Merlin, when he saw him, took him by the hand, and led him to one of the two seats that were by the Perilous Seat. "That is your place," said he.

CHAPTER III

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR BALIN

NOT many days after that the King was wedded to Guinevere there came tidings to the court that King Rience of North Wales had come again out of his country across the King's borders, and had done much damage. Thereupon the King called together his lords to take counsel how they might best abate this mischief. And while they were in debate there came a damsel bearing a message touching this matter from Lily, that was the great lady of Avilion. As she told her message to the King, she chanced to let her mantle fall aside, whereupon it was seen that she was girded with a great sword. Said the King, "How is it, damsel, that you are girded with that sword? It becomes you not." The damsel answered: "I may not be quit of this sword, which is a grievous trouble and burden to me, except by a good knight; a valiant man must he be, and free of all villainy and treachery. If I may

find such a knight, he will be able to draw the sword out of its scabbard, but none other can. I have been to the court of King Rience, who has many valiant knights, but not one of them could draw it forth. Now I would gladly make trial of the knights that sit at your Round Table."

So the knights of the Table made trial of the sword, one after another, but they could not draw it from the scabbard for all their striving. The damsel grieved much that they did not prevail, saying, "Alas! I had thought that here surely there were knights that were free from all wrong and treachery." "So think I yet," said the King, "but it is not God's will that any one of them should help you."

Now there chanced to be at the court at this time a certain poor knight, Balin by name. He had been fast in prison for six months because he had slain a knight that was akin to King Arthur; but now the barons had caused him to be set free, knowing that he was a good man and had been wronged in this matter of slaying the King's kinsman. He watched how the matter went with the damsel and the sword, but held back, nor came to the front rank, because he was but poorly clad. But when the damsel bade farewell to King Arthur, and was now ready to depart as not finding any one that could do her errand, he took heart of grace, and said, "Damsel, I

pray you of your courtesy to let me make trial of this sword, for though I am but poorly clothed, I am not the less assured in my heart that I can do this thing." And when the damsel looked at him, she saw that he was of a noble aspect; nevertheless, because he was so meanly arrayed, she judged that he had done some villainy, and had so fallen from a good estate into poverty. Therefore she was for denying him, and said, "There is no need to trouble me any more in this matter, for why should you prevail where others have failed?" "Damsel," said he, "worthiness and valour and all good graces may lie hidden under poor clothing, seeing that the better part of a man lies, not in his array, but in himself." "You say true," cried the damsel, "therefore you shall make trial of the sword." Then Sir Balin took the belt and the scabbard in one hand, and with the other he drew out the sword right easily. And when he saw the sword it pleased him well. But the knights marvelled much to see him do it, and some said that he had prevailed by enchantments. "Now," said the damsel, "this is the best and truest knight that ever I saw. But I pray you, Sir Knight, that you give me the sword again." "Nay," answered Balin, "the sword will I keep unless it be taken from me by force." "You are not wise to keep it," answered the damsel, "for

with it you shall slay the man that you love best in the world, and it shall be for your destruction." But Balin would not consent, saying that he was content to endure what God should ordain. "It must be as you will," said the damsel, "but I ask more for your sake than for mine, for of a surety this sword will be a trouble to you." Thereupon she departed in great grief. After this Sir Balin made him ready to depart. But the King would fain have kept him, saying, "Pardon me, I pray you, if I have done you wrong, for I have been falsely informed concerning you, and knew not that you were of such worth. But now, if you will abide with me, I will promote you in such fashion that you shall be content." Said Balin, "I thank your highness for your grace ; nevertheless I must depart." Then the King answered, "Go, therefore, if it must needs be, but tarry not long ; and when you come again, you shall be welcome, and I will make amends for what I have done amiss." "I thank you, sire," said Sir Balin, and made ready to depart.

But while he was making ready there came a lady, richly clad, on horseback, and saluted the King, and said, "I pray you for a gift which you promised me in exchange for a sword." "I remember the promise," said the King. "Now what is your will ?" "I ask the head of the knight that has newly won this sword, or else the head of the

damsel that brought it. And if you would give me the two heads, I should not grieve, for the knight slew my brother, a good knight, and the damsel caused my mother to die." But the King made answer, "This gift I cannot grant; but ask any other thing and you shall have it." "I will have nothing but this," said she, and turned to depart. But ere she went, Balin saw her, and knew her as having brought his mother to death, and he had sought her for three years. And when he heard the errand on which she had come, he went to her and said, "Seek you my head? Verily you shall lose your own." And so saying, he smote off her head before the King's eyes. Thereupon the King cried out, "Alas! you have done me great shame, slaying this lady, who was under safe conduct, before my very eyes. This will I never forgive." Sir Balin answered, "My lord, your displeasure troubles me, but know that this lady was the falsest woman that ever lived. By her arts she caused my mother, that had done no wrong, to be burned alive." "Nevertheless, however great your quarrel," said the King, "you should have forborne to avenge it in such fashion. Never was such shame done to my court before. Now, therefore, depart with all speed." So Sir Balin departed, carrying with him the head of the Lady of the Lake. And being outside the town he met his

squire, and said to him, "Take this head to my kinsmen in Northumberland and tell them that I am rid of my worst enemy. As for me, I will go against King Rience, and will either destroy him or die. And if I live, the King will be my good friend again."

Now there was in the court a certain knight, Lanceor by name, a king's son from Ireland. He had a high esteem of himself, and greatly grudged to Sir Balin that he had achieved the drawing of the sword, for it grieved him that he should be manifestly excelled in any matter by another. So he asked leave of the King that he might ride after Balin and punish him for his misdeed. "Go," said the King, "and do your best; I have great anger against this Balin, for he has put me to an open shame." So Sir Lanceor armed himself, and rode with all the speed that he might after Balin. And when he came in sight of him, he cried with a loud voice, "Now, tarry, Sir Knight. Tarry you shall, whether you will or no." Thereupon Sir Balin turned himself and said to the king's son from Ireland, "What will you, fair Knight? Do you desire to joust with me?" "Yes," said Sir Lanceor, "that is my desire." "Yet," Sir Balin made answer, "peradventure it had been better for you to tarry at home, for some who would put others to shame fall into it themselves. From

what court come you?" "I come," said the king's son of Ireland, "from King Arthur's court, and I seek to avenge the wrong that you have done this day to the King and his fellowship." "I shall be loath to do any shame to King Arthur or his knights. Know, therefore, that this lady whom I slew was the falsest woman upon earth. Otherwise I had not slain her, for there is no knight living that would be less willing to slay a lady." But Sir Lanceor only cried, "Make you ready to fight, for one of us shall not go hence." So they ran at each other with their spears in rest as fast as their horses could go. The king's son of Ireland smote the shield of Sir Balin so hardly that his spear was broken to shivers. Sir Balin, on the other hand, drave his spear through his adversary's shield, and through his coat of mail, and through his body; and when he had done this, he turned his horse, and drew his sword, preparing to strike, but Sir Lanceor lay dead upon the ground.

In a little while Sir Balin espied a knight riding towards him, and when he was near enough to discern his arms, he saw that it was his brother Balan. When they met they took off their helmets, and kissed each other and wept for joy. "This is a happy chance of our meeting," said Balan. "And first I wish you joy of your deliverance from the prison, for some one told me

that you were free, and therefore did I come hither hoping to find you." Then Balin told Balan how he had displeased the King by slaying the Lady of the Lake. "See too," he said, "this knight lying dead. The King sent him after me to avenge the slight that I had put upon his majesty, and I slew him. Now the King is the very worthiest knight in all the world, and it grieves me much that I have displeased him; nor is there anything that I would not do to get his favour for myself again. I hear that King Rience of North Wales is besieging the castle of Terabil. This Rience is an enemy to the King. Let us go, therefore, with all haste and show against him such valour as we may." "I will go right willingly," said Sir Balan.

So Balin and Balan rode together towards the castle of Terabil. And as they went they met Merlin, but so disguised that they knew him not. "Whither ride you?" said Merlin. "Why should we tell thee our errand?" answered Balin. "Do you tell us your name." "That," said Merlin, "I am not minded to do at this present." Balin said, "'Tis not to be believed that you are a true man, if you will not tell your name." "Be that as it may," said Merlin, "I know your purpose. You are riding to meet King Rience, but meet him you will not, unless you are ruled by my counsel." Then cried Balin,

"Now I know you, who you are. You are Merlin. Give us your counsel, for we will be ruled by it."

So Merlin bade them tarry in a wood that was near to the highway, taking the bridles from their horses that the beasts might feed, and resting themselves till it was close upon midnight. Then he bade them rise, for, said he, "King Rience has stolen away from his host on a certain errand that he has with three score of his knights, of whom twenty go before." So the twenty rode by. And when they had ridden by, after a while, Merlin showed Balin and his brother where the King was riding. Then the two charged the King with all their might, and laid him on the ground sorely wounded, and slew also many of his people. Then they turned again to the King, and would have slain him but that he yielded himself to them. "You are right valiant knights," he said; "slay me not, I pray you, for you will gain nought by my death, but by my life much." So the two laid him in a litter borne by two horses.

While these things were doing, Merlin vanished out of that place and came to King Arthur, and told him that his worst enemy was vanquished. "How came that to pass?" said the King. "Two knights did it," answered Merlin, "who desired to please you by so doing, and to-morrow

you shall know who they are." On the morrow came Balin and Balan, bringing King Rience with them, whom they delivered to the porters, and so departed.

When King Arthur saw Rience, he said to him, "You are welcome, Sir King. How came you hither?" King Rience answered, "I came hither by a hard adventure." Said King Arthur, "Who got the mastery over you?" "Two knights," said Rience, "whereof one bears two swords"—you must know that Balin carried two swords, to wit his own and that which he drew from the damsel's scabbard—"and another that I judge to be his brother, and marvellously mighty knights they are." The King said, "I know them not, but I am greatly beholden to them." Thereupon Merlin said to the King, "The knight of the two swords is Balin, and the other is Balan his brother, a good knight. As for Balin, there is none better, and it is a thing much to be lamented that he may not live long." "You say true," answered the King, "and I grieve the more that I have but ill deserved such good service from him." "He shall do better service than this," said Merlin, "for know that King Nero, who is Rience's brother, is at hand with a great host, and will set on you to-morrow before dinner. Make you ready, therefore, to meet him."

And thus it fell out. King Nero came on the morrow with a great host. With them were many kings, of whom the most notable was Lot, King of Orkney. Now this host was many times greater than the host of King Arthur. Therefore Merlin used this device. He went to King Lot and so occupied him with a tale of prophecy, that he neglected to get his men in order for the battle. In this meanwhile, King Arthur and his men fell fiercely upon King Nero. The King bore himself most valiantly in this battle, killing twenty knights with his own hand and wounding forty more. Sir Kaye also, that was his seneschal, did very valiantly. But none did so well as the Knight of the Two Swords and Sir Balan his brother. All that saw them were ready to believe that they were angels from heaven, so great was their might, and the King himself affirmed that he had never seen better knights. Thus was Nero's host destroyed. When this was told to King Lot, he cried out: "Now through my fault many good men have perished. Verily had I been in the battle with my men, no host in all the world could have stood against us. But this wizard has mocked me with his talk and we are undone." Then he turned to his chief knights and asked them what it were best to do. "Shall we make peace with King Arthur or shall we fight with him?" And his chief knights answered, "Let

us fight with him, for his men are weary." "So be it," said King Lot, "and let every man do his part as I shall do mine." So they put forward their banners, and the two hosts met with a great clash of spears. But King Arthur and his men prevailed, nor did any bear themselves more valiantly than the Knight of the Two Swords and Balan his brother. On the other side King Lot was ever in the front, and did many great deeds. But at last the Knight of the Pavilion, that is to say King Pellenore, smote him with a great stroke through the helmet and clave him through the head, so that he fell dead on the ground.

CHAPTER IV

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR BALIN (*continued*)

AFTER two days, King Arthur, being somewhat sick, caused his pavilion to be pitched in a meadow. As he lay there, desiring to sleep, for his sleep had departed from him, he heard the neigh of a horse, and looking out from the door of the pavilion, saw a knight making great lamentation. "What is your grief?" said the King. "You cannot amend it," answered the knight, and so passed on. In a short space came Sir Balin, and saluted the King. The King said to him, "You are welcome. But a short time ago there came a knight this way making great lamentation, and he would not tell me the cause. Follow him, I pray you, and bring him hither, either by force or of his own good will." "I will do that and more," answered Balin, and so rode into the forest after the while. After a time he found him and a damsel with him, and said to him, "Sir Knight, I would have you

come to King Arthur and tell him the cause of your grief." But the knight answered, "I will not tell it; the telling would be a pain, and would not profit either him or me." "But you must needs go," said Balin; "I will compel you, if I have to fight for it." "Will you be my warrant, if I go?" said the knight. "That I will," answered Balin, "or die for it." So the knight went with Balin, leaving the damsel in the forest; but when they came to the King's pavilion, there came an invisible rider, and smote the sorrowful knight through the body with a spear. "Now am I slain," said the knight. "I know who has done the deed. It is a traitorous knight, Garlon by name, who rides invisible. Take, therefore, my horse, for it is better than yours, and go to the damsel, and follow the quest on which I was set. In this she will lead you."

So Balin went back to the forest, and found the damsel. There they met a knight that had been hunting, who, seeing that Balin was sorrowful, inquired of him the cause. "I care not to tell you," said Balin. "Were I armed, I would constrain you," answered the knight. But Balin said, "I have no fear to tell you," and he told him how the knight had been slain by an invisible rider. "Is it so?" said the knight; "then will I go with you, so long as I live." But when they were hard by a hermitage as they travelled, the

invisible knight Garlon came again, and smote the hunting knight through the body that he died. "Now," said Balin, "this is the second time that this traitor has wronged me. Of a truth he shall suffer for it." Then he and the damsel rode on till they came to a castle. Here Balin alighted from his horse and made as if he would go in. But when he was past the gate, the damsel being behind, the portcullis fell, and Balin looked and saw many men about the damsel, who made as if they would slay her. It vexed him much that he could not help her. Thereupon he went upon the wall, and leaped down into the ditch, yet without taking any hurt. But when he drew his sword the men would not fight with him. "Nay," they said, "we do but the old custom of the castle. Our lady lies sick, and if any damsel comes this way, we take of her blood in a silver dish, if it may heal our lady." "The damsel may do so, if she will," said Balin, "but she shall not lose her life. For that I will answer." So the damsel gave her blood, a silver dish full, but it did not avail the sick lady. But afterwards, Sir Percival's sister helped her with her blood, but in helping her she died, for so it must ever be, a life for a life.

That night they abode in the castle. On the morrow they departed, and so rode for three or four days, without meeting any adventure. On

the fourth day they were lodged by a certain rich man. As they sat at supper, Sir Balin heard one that sat near to him complaining grievously, and asked what it might be. "I will tell you," said his host. "I was lately at a tournament, when I jousted with a certain knight that is brother to King Pelleas. Twice I jousted with him, and twice I smote him down. Then he, being in great anger, swore that he would be avenged on me, through one that was very dear to me. And this he did, for he wounded my son, riding invisible, as is his manner. Nor can the lad be healed till I have this false knight's blood. "Ah!" said Balin, "I know that knight who rides invisible. Twice has he done me great despite, slaying in this same way two knights that were in my company. Now I had rather meet this knight than have all the gold in this realm." "You shall meet him," answered his host. "Within twenty days from hence, King Pelleas will make a great feast. There you will see this knight that is your enemy and mine." "This is good news," said Sir Balin. "Rest assured that you shall have the blood wherewith to heal your son."

So on the morrow they set out, and when they had journeyed for fifteen days they came to King Pelleas's castle. Sir Balin was well received. The King's people brought him to a fair chamber,

and unarmed him, and brought him well seeming robes for his wearing. But when they would have had him leave his sword, he was not willing. So they suffered him to keep it. Then they led him to where the King's guests were assembled, and put him in an honourable place, and the damsel near him. In a short space Sir Balin asked of a knight that sat by, "Is there not a knight in this court whose name is Garlon?" "Verily there is," said the knight. "That is he yonder, the knight with the dark face. There is no more marvellous knight living. He goes invisible, and so has slain many knights." Then Balin took counsel with himself, thinking, "If I slay him here, I shall scarcely escape with my own life, and if I leave him, 'tis much to be feared that I shall never see him again, and he will do yet more mischief than he has done already." But while he thought on these things, looking hard at Garlon meanwhile, Garlon espied him, and coming to him smote him in the face with the back of his hand, saying, "Sir Knight, why look you on me in this fashion? Eat your meat and be content, doing that for which you came." For he would say that Sir Balin had come for the feast only. Thereupon Sir Balin cried aloud, "You say well. This is the third time that you have done me despite, therefore will I do the thing for which I came." Thereupon he rose up

and smote the false knight so heavy a blow that he clave him to the very shoulders. Then he said to the damsel, "Give me the truncheon of the spear wherewith this traitor slew your knight," for the damsel had borne the truncheon with her. So the damsel gave it to him, and he ran Sir Garlon's body through with it, saying, "With that truncheon you slew a good knight, and now it is in your body." And he called to his host, "You can have blood enough wherewith to heal your son."

Hereupon all the knights that sat at the table rose up to set on Sir Balin; but King Pelleas stayed them, crying out to Balin, "You have slain my brother, and shall die for it, but no man shall have a hand in your death but myself only." So saying, he caught with his hand a great sword, and smote at Sir Balin therewith; and when Sir Balin put up his own sword to guard the stroke, it burst asunder. Being therefore left weaponless, he ran into his chamber to find wherewith to arm himself, and so, seeking the same, from chamber to chamber, King Pelleas continually following. At the last he came to a chamber marvellously well furnished. In the chamber was a bed dight with cloth of gold, of as great richness as could be, and on the bed there was one lying, and hard by it a table of pure gold, and under the table four pillars of

silver, bearing it up, and on the table a spear, very finely wrought. When Balin saw the spear, he caught it in his hand, and smote King Pelleas therewith, dealing him so sore a blow that the King fell down in a swoon. And at the same instant of time the castle was reft in twain and the walls fell, for Balin had stricken the Dolorous Stroke.

For three days both Sir Balin and the King lay under the ruins of the castle, and could move neither hand nor foot. On the fourth day came Merlin, and took up Balin, and put him on another horse, for his own horse was dead, and bade him ride away. And when Balin would fain have taken the damsel with him, Merlin showed her to him lying dead, for she had perished in the falling of the castle ; Merlin also told him the cause of the mishap. "Know," he said, "that he who lay on the bed was Joseph of Arimathea, to whom King Pelleas is of kin, and that the spear on the table was that with which Longius the Roman soldier smote the Lord as He hung upon the Cross." So Balin rode forth, saying to Merlin, "We shall meet no more." And wherever he rode, men said to him, "O Balin, you have done grievous harm to all these lands, striking King Pelleas with the Dolorous Stroke."

After three days' riding, he came to a cross,

whereon was written in letters of gold, "Let no knight ride alone to this castle." But Balin rode on nor heeded. When he had gone a little way there met him an old man with white hair, who said to him, "Balin, you pass your bounds ; turn again, for it is yet time." But he rode on, and the old man vanished out of his sight. After this he heard a horn blow, as the hunters blow it when they have taken their prey. Said Balin, "That blast is blown for me ; I am the prey, yet I live." After this he came to a castle. Without it was a great company of ladies, a hundred or more, and many knights, who greeted him heartily, and led him into the castle, in which there was much mirth, dancing, and minstrelsy and the like. The chief lady of the castle said to him, "Sir Knight of the Two Swords, there is a certain knight here that keeps an island, and no man may pass thereby but that he must joust with him." "That is an ill custom," said Sir Balin ; "nevertheless if it must be, I am ready. My horse, perchance, is weary, but my heart is not weary." Then said one of the knights that stood by, "Sir, your shield is not good ; 'tis not big enough ; take this, it will guard you better." So Balin took the shield, and his own, whereon was blazoned the device that he bore, he left behind. Then he and his horse were put into a great boat and carried across to the island.

When he came to the other side, there met him a damsel who said, "Sir Knight, why have you left your own shield? You have put yourself in peril, for by your shield it would have been known who you are, that is, one that has no fellow for strength and valour." Balin made answer, "I repent me much that ever I came into this country, but having come I must needs go through with this adventure, for it were a shame to me to turn back." So he looked to his armour, and seeing it was in good case, he mounted his horse and set forward.

He had not gone far when there came forth from a castle that was upon the island, a knight clothed in red, his horse having trappings of red also. And when this knight saw the new-comer, and considered his look and manner, he said to himself, "This is Balin;" but when he saw his shield that it had no device upon it, he said again, "Nay, it is not so, it is another." So they laid their spears in rest and jousted together. Each smote the other on the shield with so mighty a blow as to overthrow both horse and rider. Then they lay both of them on the ground in a swoon, but Balin was sorely bruised by the falling of his horse, for he was greatly wearied with his travel. Then the knight of the castle rose to his feet and drew his sword, and went to his adversary. Balin arose also. First the knight struck

a great blow, and shore through his shield and brake his helm. Balin also, on his part, dealt a great blow with his sword, and well-nigh felled the Knight of the Island to the ground. Then they fought together, till they were out of breath. And when they looked up to the castle, they saw that the towers were full of ladies. Then having fetched their breath they fought again. Never was there so fierce a battle, for each dealt the other seven great wounds, so great that each one of them had done a giant to death. At last the Knight of the Island withdrew him a space and lay on the ground. Said Balin to him, "Who are you? Never have I met with so stout a knight." "My name," said he, "is Balan, and I am brother to the good knight Balin." "Alas!" said Balin, "that I should ever have lived to see this day!" and so saying he fell back in a swoon. Then Balan crept on his hands and feet—for he was sore spent with bleeding—and unlaced his brother's helm, and so saw his brother's visage, yet knew it not, so marred and broken was it. But when Balin awoke from his swoon, he said, "O brother, I have slain thee, and thou hast slain me." And Balan answered, "It was an ill fortune that I did not know thee; the two swords I saw, but the shield had no device."

So these two made a great moan over each other. And when the lady of the castle came,

they besought her that they might both be buried in the same place where they had fought. And this she promised ; and also that there should be written on the tomb an inscription to this purpose : “ Here lie two brothers that slew each other unknowing.”

Thereupon Balan died, but Balin died not till midnight.

CHAPTER V

THE ADVENTURE OF SIR GARETH

IT was King Arthur's custom at Pentecost not to sit down to meat till he had seen or heard some strange adventure. Now it fell out in a certain year that Sir Gawaine, looking out of a window a little while before noon, saw three men riding and a dwarf. Of the three, one was taller by a cubit than his fellows. Thereupon said Sir Gawaine to the King, "Sire, you may go to your meat with a good heart, for here, without doubt, is an adventure such as you desire." And so indeed it was.

Anon there came into the hall the three men, and he that was by so much bigger than his fellows leaned upon their shoulders. And all that sat in the hall—and at Pentecost-tide the Round Table was ever full—said he was as fair and goodly a youth as ever they had seen. Broad was he in the shoulders and of a seemly countenance, and his hands were the fairest and

biggest that ever man saw; but he went as though he could not bear himself up of his own strength. So the three came to the daïs, and there the tall youth lifted himself, and stood straight, and said to the King, "Sire, I pray that God bless thee and this fair fellowship of the Round Table. I am come to pray three gifts of you. One gift I will ask of you now, and two I will ask come this time next year." "Ask," said the King, "for you shall have." So the tall youth said, "I pray you now that you grant me meat and drink sufficient for me for twelve months." "Nay, my son," answered the King, "that is but a small thing. Ask something better, for I am persuaded that you come of an honourable house, and shall show yourself worthy thereof." But the young man would have nothing else, neither would he tell his name. "That is passing strange," said the King, "that so goodly a man knows not his own name." Then he called Sir Kaye, the seneschal, and charged him to give the stranger meat and drink of the best and all things else that he might need. But Sir Kaye was scornful of him, saying, "I warrant me that he is but a churl, and will never be of any account. Surely, had he been gently born, he would have asked for a horse and armour and not for meat and drink. And as he has no name I will call him Fairhands, and I will bring him

into the kitchen, where he shall have pottage every day, so that in twelve months he shall be fat as a hog." Sir Gawaine liked not this mocking, and said to Sir Kaye, "Let be; I will warrant that the youth is worthy." "That cannot be," answered Sir Kaye; "as he is, so has he asked." And the same he said to Sir Lancelot, for Lancelot also had a good esteem of the youth.

So Fairhands went to the further part of the hall, and sat down among the boys and ate his meat with little cheer. And when, after meat, Sir Lancelot would have him come to his chamber, he would not—no, nor to Sir Gawaine's, for he also would have shown him kindness. Nothing would Fairhands do, but what Sir Kaye put upon him. So for a twelve months' time he abode in the kitchen, and had his lodging with the boys. Never did he any displeasure to man or child, but was meek and mild. But ever, when there was any jousting of knights, he was there to see; nor was he backward if there was any playing of games, and he could cast an iron bar or a great stone farther than any by two yards at the least.

The feast of Pentecost next following the King kept in right royal fashion, as was indeed his wont, at Caerleon, nor did he sit him down to meat till he was assured of hearing some adventure; and the adventure was this.

A damsel came into the hall, and saluted the King, and prayed him that he would help her. "What need you?" said he. "I have a sister," answered the damsel, "that is a lady of great honour, and she is besieged in her castle by a tyrant, so that she cannot go forth. Knowing, therefore, that you have a very goodly fellowship of knights, I come to ask your help." "What is this lady's name?" said the King. The damsel answered, "That I may not tell, but the tyrant that oppresses her is called the Knight of the Marshes." "I know him not," said the King. "But I know him well," said Sir Gawaine; "he is as ill a foe to deal with as there is. 'Tis said that he has the strength of seven men, and I myself barely escaped from him with my life." Then the King said to the damsel, "Fair damsel, there are many knights who will gladly undertake this or any other adventure. But, because you will not tell your lady's name, I cannot suffer that any of them should go."

Thereupon out spake Fairhands, for he stood in the hall while the damsel made her request. "Sir King, I have been now for a full year in your hall and have had my sustenance in meat and drink. Now, therefore, I would ask of you the two gifts that I left unsaid at the first." "Ask them," said the King. "First, I ask that I may have this adventure, for it belongs to me."

"Thou shalt have it," said the King. "Second, I ask that Sir Lancelot du Lake make me a knight, and that when I am departed on this errand he should ride after me and give me knighthood where I shall ask it of him." "All this shall be as you will," said the King.

But the damsel was very wroth. "I call shame on you, Sir King. Shall I have none to help me but a knave from your kitchen?" So saying, she took horse and departed. But one came and told Fairhands that a dwarf had brought him a horse and armour and what else he needed, furnished very richly. And when he was mounted and armed, it could be seen that he was as fair a man as could be found. Then, coming into the hall, he took leave of King Arthur and of Lancelot and of Gawaine, and so departed.

After a while Sir Kaye said openly in the hall, "I will ride after this kitchen boy." Lancelot and Gawaine answered him that he would do better to abide at home. But Sir Kaye made ready, and taking his spear rode after Fairhands, and came up with him just as he on his part came up with the damsel. "Ho! Sir Fairhands," cried Sir Kaye, "know you me?" "Yes," said he, "I know you that you are a very ungentle knight, and therefore I bid you beware of me." Then Sir Kaye put his spear in rest and

rode at him. Now Fairhands had never a spear but he rode at Sir Kaye with his sword in his hand, and put away Sir Kaye's spear with his sword, and smote him so heavy a blow on his side that he fell from his horse as though he were dead. Then Fairhands lighted from his horse and took Sir Kaye's shield and spear, and bade the dwarf mount Sir Kaye's horse, and so went on his way.

And now came Sir Lancelot, for he had followed hard on Sir Kaye. "Will you joust with me?" said Fairhands. "That I will," answered Sir Lancelot. So these two laid their spears in rest, and ran together so fiercely that they bore down each other to the earth. Then rising they set to with their swords, and they fought together for an hour. And Sir Lancelot, for all that he was the best knight in all the world, marvelled at his adversary's strength, for indeed he fought more as a giant than as a common man, and Sir Lancelot had much ado to keep himself from being shamed. Then he said, "Fairhands, be not so fierce. Our quarrel is not so deadly that we must needs fight it to the end. Let us agree." "With all my heart," answered Fairhands. "Nevertheless it was good to feel your might; yet I have not showed my strength to the uttermost." "Well," said Sir Lancelot, "I have had great pains to hold my own with you."

"Think you, then," said Fairhands, "that I am proved for a knight?" "That you are," answered Lancelot, "and I will give you the order of knighthood willingly, but you must, of needs, first tell me your name." "That will I do," said Fairhands, "so that you will not discover it to any one. Know, then, that I am Gareth of Orkney, and that I am own brother to Sir Gawaine." "'Tis well heard," said Sir Lancelot; "I was ever assured that you were of a good stock, and that you came not to the court for meat and drink." Then he gave him the order of knighthood, and after let him depart on his adventure.

But Sir Lancelot caused Sir Kaye to be carried back to Caerleon, where he was healed of his wounds, but had a hard matter to come out with his life.

Sir Fairhands rode after the damsel and overtook her. But she scorned him and said, "What do you here? You stink of the kitchen, and your clothes are foul with grease and tallow. As for this knight whom you have slain, you had him at a disadvantage, and overcame in a cowardly fashion. Away with you, kitchen page. You are but a lazy lubber and a washer of dishes." "Say what you will," answered Sir Fairhands, "I take no heed thereof, nor will I depart till I have achieved the adventure which the King

has given me on your behalf." "Will you achieve it?" said she. "Beware lest there presently meet you one whom you would not encounter for all the broth that ever you supped in the King's kitchen." "I will do my best with him," answered Sir Fairhands.

As they rode through the wood there came a man running with all speed. "Whither go you?" said Sir Fairhands. "O my lord," cried the man. "In yonder wood are six thieves, who have taken my master and have bound him to a tree, and I fear greatly lest they slay him." "Lead me to him," said the knight. So the man led him, and when he was come to the place he rode at the thieves, and with his first stroke he slew one thief, and with the second another, and yet another with the third. Then the others fled from him, and he followed and overtook them. They turned, as they needs must, and assailed him with all their might, but in a short space he slew them all.

The knight that had been bound thanked him heartily for this service, and prayed him to ride with him to his castle, and would fain have rewarded him for his good deed. "Nay," said Sir Fairhands, "Sir Lancelot made me knight this day, and I will have no reward but such as God shall give me. And as for my journey, I must follow this damsel." But when he came

near to the damsel, she cried out, "Away with you, kitchen knave, you smell foully. This that you have done, you have done but by chance. Be sure that there will soon come one who will make you turn your back." But when the knight that had been bound asked the damsel to lodge for the night at his castle, she consented. At supper the knight set Sir Fairhands by the side of the damsel. Thereat she was much angered, and said, "'Tis a shame to set this kitchen knave by my side." Then was her host not a little troubled, but bade Sir Fairhands sit at a side table, and himself sat by him.

On the morrow the damsel and Sir Fairhands departed, and came in course to a great forest, where there was a river and but one place by which it might be crossed, and at this place were two knights ready to hinder any that would pass. "See you yonder knights?" said the damsel "Will you match yourself with them, or will you go back?" "Go back I will not," said Sir Fairhands, "no, not though there were six more beside the two." So he spurred his horse into the river, for one of the knights stood in the middle of the ford. They brake their spears on each other, and then betook them to their swords, wherewith they gave and received many strokes. But at the last Sir Fairhands dealt the knight of the ford so shrewd a stroke that he fell down

in the water and was drowned. This done, Sir Fairhands spurred his horse to the shore, whereon stood the other knight, and fought with him, and in no long space clave his head to the shoulders. Then he rode back to the damsel and said to her, "Fair lady, you can pass this way, for there is no one to hinder." "Alas!" said she, "that a kitchen knave should slay two valiant knights, and that by mischance or treachery, for the horse of the one stumbled in the water so that he was drowned, and as for the other, you came behind and slew him by craft." "Say what you will, damsel," answered the knight, "I will follow you still and do that which I am set to do."

So they rode on together, and about the time of evensong they came to a black hawthorn; on one side was a black banner, and on the other hung a black shield. Hard by a black spear stood fast in the ground, and there was fastened a great horse with trappings of black. "Now fly," said the damsel to the knight, "while you may." "You will always have me a coward," said Sir Fairhands. Then said the knight that had all things black to the damsel, "Fair lady, have you brought this man from King Arthur's court to be your champion?" "Not so," said she, "but he is a knave from the kitchen, where he has been fed for alms." "Why then," said the black knight, "does he ride in your company

and be so arrayed?" "Not of my good will," she answered, "but he has overthrown sundry knights by some mischance." "But," answered the knight, "why did they have to do with such a knave?" "Because, seeing that he rides with me, they hold him to be an honourable man." The black knight answered, "That may well be; but it cannot be denied that he is a man of a fair presence and, as I should judge, of great strength. Yet it is unseemly that he should ride in this fashion. So I will even put him on his feet and suffer him to depart with his life, but his horse and his armour will I keep." Then spake Sir Fairhands in great anger: "You are right free with my horse and harness, which cost you nought. Verily you shall not have them save you win them with your hands. Let me see, then, what you can do." "Say you so?" said the black knight, "now yield, for it is unseemly that a kitchen knave should ride with a lady." Sir Fairhands answered, "I am no kitchen knave, but a gentleman born, and of a better stock than you, and that will I prove upon your body." Thereupon they went back with their horses and laid their spears in rest and charged with a crash as if it had been thunder. The black knight's spear was broken, but Sir Fairhands' spear pierced his adversary's side and stuck fast in it. Nevertheless he drew his sword and dealt Sir Fairhands

many sore strokes, but could not prevail against him, but anon fell from his horse in a swoon, and died within the space of two hours. And Sir Fairhands, seeing that he was well armed and had a right good horse, took these for his own and so rode after the damsel. Nor did she scorn him the less, but said, "Now is this a grievous thing, that such a knave as thou art should by an ill chance slay so good a knight. Nevertheless I would have you beware, for there will come anon one who shall make you flee." "Damsel," said Sir Fairhands, "it may befall me to be beaten or slain, but your company will I not leave for all that you can say. Now mark you this, that though you say always that some knight shall beat me or slay me, yet ever it falls out that they are cast to the ground and I live. Were it not better that you should hold your peace?"

CHAPTER VI

THE ADVENTURE OF SIR GARETH (*continued*)

As they rode together a knight came by whose harness was of green, and the trappings of his horse the same, and he said to the damsel, "Is that my brother the black knight whom you have brought with you?" "Nay," said she; "by mishap this kitchen knave has slain your brother." "It's a pity," said the green knight, "that such a thing should be done, for my brother was a very noble knight." And he turned to Sir Fairhands in great anger, and said, "You shall die for the slaying of my brother." "I defy you," said he; "I slew him in fair battle." Thereupon the green knight blew three notes upon a horn that hung upon a tree hard by, and when he had blown there came three damsels, and armed him, and all his armour and arms were green. Then the two fought, first with their spears, and afterwards, their spears being broken, with their swords. 'Twas a long battle and a fierce between the two,

and neither could gain advantage of the other. But when the damsel cried, "My lord the green Knight, for shame! Why stand you fighting so long with this kitchen knave?" the man gathered all his strength, and smote a mighty blow, and clave Sir Fairhands' shield from the top to the bottom. Sir Fairhands took no little shame to himself when he saw the shield broken, and thought what the damsel would say. But the thing roused a great wrath in him, and he gave the green knight so hard a buffet on the head that he fell on his knees; and being on his knees, Sir Fairhands caught him by the middle, and threw him on the ground that he could not help himself. Thereupon the green knight yielded himself, crying Sir Fairhands' mercy, and praying for his life. But he said, "Tis in vain; you must die, save only if this damsel will beg your life of me." So saying he unlaced the knight's helmet, as if he would slay him. But the damsel said, "Fie on you, kitchen knave; I will not beg his life of you." "Then must he die," said he. Then the green knight cried full piteously: "Must I die for the lack of one fair word? I will forgive you my brother's death, and swear to become your man, and thirty knights that hold their lands of me shall be yours also." "This is a pretty thing," cried the damsel, "that you and thirty knights more should

be the men of a kitchen knave." Then said Sir Fairhands again, "All this avails nothing if this lady will not speak for you." And so saying, he made pretence to slay him. Then the damsel cried aloud: "Hold thy hand, knave; slay him not, or you shall repent it." Then said he: "Sir Knight with the green arms, this damsel prays for your life, and because I will not make her wroth, but will do all that she puts upon me, I spare you.' Then the green knight rose from the ground, and took them to his manor, which was hard by, and entreated them courteously. But still the damsel abated not her scorn, and would not suffer Sir Fairhands to sit at table with her, whereat the green knight marvelled much, and spake what was in his mind to the damsel. "Tis passing strange," he said, "that you rebuke this noble knight in so ill a fashion, for a very noble knight he is, and one who may not easily be matched. Be sure, whatsoever he maketh himself, you will find at the last that he is of a King's blood." "Shame on you," cried the damsel in her anger, "that you should say such words of him." "Nay," said he, "it were rather shame if I spake otherwise, for he has proved himself to be a better knight than I am, and yet I have known many knights in times past, but not one that was his match."

The next day they came to another castle,

built very fairly of white stone, with battlements round about it, and over the great gate fifty shields of divers colours. The lord of this castle had his armour and horse's trappings all of red, and he was brother to the black knight and to the green. Let it suffice to say that he also fought with Sir Fairhands, and was beaten to the ground, and that the damsel was constrained to pray for his life, he promising, for his part, that he and the sixty knights that held of him would be Sir Fairhands' men for ever. "What I require of you is this," said Sir Fairhands, "that you come, when I shall bid you, and swear to be the man of my lord King Arthur." "That will I do," said the other, "with all my heart."

As they rode on the morrow, the knight said to the damsel: "You do ill to rebuke me in this fashion, for I have done you no small service. You say ever that I shall be conquered by the knights that I meet, but it ever falls out otherwise, for they lie in the dust before me. Henceforward, I pray you, rebuke me if you see me base or a coward, for you must know that I will not depart from you. Verily I were a fool so to do, for in your company I win for myself great honour." "Well," said she, "you shall soon meet with one that is the most honourable knight in all the world, save King Arthur only. He will pay you your wages." "So be it," said the

knight. "If he be honourable, I shall have the greater honour in dealing with him."

In a short space they came within sight of a fair city, and before the city there lay a great meadow, newly mown, and in the meadow many pavilions. "See," said the damsel, "yonder pavilion that is of the colour of gold of India, and the knight, and the ladies in the meadow whose harness and clothing are of the same. This is the dwelling of Sir Persaunt of India, the lordliest knight that ever you saw." "Be it so," said Sir Fairhands; "how stout a knight soever he be, I have a good hope to see him under his shield." "You had better flee while it is yet time," said she. "Not so," he made answer, "for if he be a noble knight, he will not set on me with all his company; and if he come against me alone, I will not refuse to meet him so long as I live." 'Tis a foolish boast for a kitchen knave," said she. "Nay, damsel," answered Sir Fairhands, "rebuke me not in this sort. 'Tis worse to me than to do five battles." Then the damsel said: "Sir, I marvel much who and of what kin you are. You speak boldly, and you do boldly, as I myself have seen. But in truth I fear for you, for you and your horse are wearied with much journeying. So far you have come safely through all passages, but now I am sore afraid. For this Persaunt is a stout knight, and though you overcame him, yet you may well

get some hurt in so doing. And, if it so befall, how will you fare with the knight that besieges my lady, for I warrant you that he is a stouter knight by far than even Sir Persaunt." "Have no care, fair lady," said the knight, "for now that I am come so near to this knight, I must needs make trial of him, how stout soever he be. Verily it were a shame to me should I draw back. I doubt not to deal so with him, that by two hours after noon you shall beg his life, so that we may come to the place of the siege while it is yet day." Then the damsel cried out, "O sir, I marvel much at you. Ever I have used most ungentle words to you, and you have answered me ever most gently; that you could not have done had you not been of gentle blood." "Damsel," said Sir Fairhands, "trouble not yourself. You harmed me not with your words; nay, you helped me, for the more you angered me, the more I spent my anger on the knights that came against me. But surely, whether or no I be a gentleman born, I have done you a gentleman's service, and shall do you yet more before I depart from you." "I pray you, sir, to pardon me," said she. "With all my heart," he answered; "and now that you speak me fair, I think that there is nothing upon the earth that I cannot do."

By this time Sir Persaunt had perceived the

knight and the damsel, and sent to know whether they came for war or for peace. "That," answered Sir Fairhands, "shall be as it pleases him." "Then," said Sir Persaunt, "I will make trial of him." So they ran together with their spears, and fought long and stoutly with their swords. But in the end Sir Persaunt fared no better than they who had gone before him, for Sir Fairhands smote him to the earth with a great blow upon his helmet, and then standing over him, began to unlace his helmet, as though he would have slain him. But the damsel begged his life, which Sir Fairhands readily granted, saying, "'Twere a pity that so good a knight should die." Then Sir Persaunt swore fealty to him for himself and for the hundred knights that held of him.

On the morrow, when they would depart, Sir Persaunt demanded of the damsel, "Whither go you with this knight?" "I go," said she, "to the Castle Dangerous where my sister is besieged." "Say you so?" said he; "the knight that makes that siege is the most dangerous upon the earth. He has besieged the castle now two years, and might have taken it long since, but he would not, for he waits to see whether Sir Lancelot, or Sir Tristram of Lyonesse, or Sir Lamorack of Gales, or Sir Gawaine will not come to the help of the lady, having a great

desire to do battle with one of these." "Will you make this gentleman knight?" said the damsel. "With all my heart," he answered, "if he be content to take the order of knighthood from so simple a man as I." But Sir Fairhands thanked him, saying that he had been made knight by Sir Lancelot. "You could not have had it from a better," said he, "for of all knights in the world, the three best are these—Sir Lancelot, Sir Tristram, and Sir Lamorack, and if you match the knight of the siege, who is called the Red Knight, you may be put as a fourth with them."

The lady of the castle had word of her sister's coming, and of the knight whom she brought with her, by the dwarf. "What manner of man is he?" said the lady, who was called the Dame Lyones. "He is a very noble knight," said the dwarf, "and though he be young, you never saw a likelier man." "And what is his name?" said she. The dwarf answered: "That I may not tell you, but he is the son of the King of Orkney, and Sir Lancelot made him knight." And he told her how he had slain the two knights at the ford—"they were stout knights," said she, "but murderers"—and the black knight also, and had overcome the green knight, and the red and the blue. "These are good tidings," said the Dame. "Now take two flagons of wine, and loaves, and

venison, and fowls, and a cup of gold, and set them in the hermitage. Having done this, go to my sister, and tell her to bid the knight eat and drink, and make him strong for that which he has to do. And take my greeting to him, and say that he will have to do with a very valiant knight, but one who has no courtesy or gentleness but thinks only of murder." The dwarf did his errand, and as he returned, there met him the red knight of the Red Lands, who asked him of his business. And when the dwarf told him how that the sister of Dame Lyones had brought a knight with her. "I count his travel lost," he said, "for were he Sir Lancelot, or Sir Tristram, or Sir Lamorack, or Sir Gawaine, I count myself as good as any of them. But who is he?" "He is a king's son," answered the dwarf. "I care not," said the red knight. "He shall die a shameful death, as many good knights have died before him at my hands."

Meanwhile Sir Fairhands and the damsel came near to the castle, and the knight spied sundry great trees, as they rode, and forty knights, richly armed, hanging thereon, with gilded spurs upon their heels. "What means this?" said he. "Keep a brave heart," said she, "or you are lost. These all are knights who came to rescue my sister, and this man who besieges her overcame them and put them to a shameful death without mercy.

And so you will fare, if you show not yourself better than he." "Verily," said he, "I had sooner die in battle. But though you say he is a valiant knight, he keeps a very shameful custom, and I marvel much that none of my lord Arthur's knights have dealt with him after his deserts."

As they rode on they came to a sycomore tree, whereon hung a great horn, as great as ever was seen, made out of the tusk of an elephant. "That," said the damsel, "the knight of the Red Lands has hung there ; if any one blow it, he will make himself ready, and come forth and meet him in battle. But I pray you blow it not till noon is past, for they say that till it is noon his strength increases till it be as the strength of seven men." "Nay," said Sir Fairhands, "give me no such counsel, I will meet him at his best, for I will either win all the honour that may be won, or die in the field." Thereupon he leapt lightly to the tree, and blew upon the horn so eagerly that all the castle and the siege works round about rang again. And many knights of the siege looked out of their pavilions, and many of the castle looked out of their windows. And when the knight of the Red Lands heard it, he made haste to prepare himself. Two barons buckled on his spurs, and an earl set the helmet on his head, and his squires brought him a shield and a spear, and all that he had upon him was blood red.

“Sir,” said the damsel to her knight — the damsel’s name, you should know, was Linet— “there is your enemy, and at yonder window is my sister, Dame Lyones.” “Where?” said he. And she pointed with her finger. “Verily,” said he, “she is the fairest lady that ever I beheld, if I can see so far. Truly she shall be my lady, and for her will I fight.” And he looked smiling to the window. And Dame Lyones curtsied to him to the ground. But the knight of the Red Lands cried, “Have done with thy looking. Know that she is my lady, for whom I have fought many battles.” “Then you have spent much labour in vain,” said Sir Fairhands, “for she loves thee not, and that a man should love one that loves him not is a great folly. Verily I would not have come had I not known that I was welcome. But that she will have none of thee is plain from this besieging. Know therefore that I will rescue her from thee, or die in the field.” “You had best take warning,” said the other, “by the knights that hang there upon the trees.” “Nay,” said Sir Fairhands, “that is a shameful sight, and it has given me a greater courage than if you had been an honourable knight.” “Have done with thy talking and make ready,” said the knight of the siege.

Then the two put their spears in rest, and charged, and smote each other on the shields

with so strong a blow that the girths of their saddles were burst, and both fell to the ground, holding their bridles in their hands. All that saw them thought that the necks of both had been broken, but they said also that never before had any knight held his own in such fashion with the knight of the siege. Anon the two fighters rose from the ground, and drew their swords, and put their shields before them, and made at each other. Like two lions they fought together, till it was past noon. Then by common consent they parted for awhile till they could take breath, and then did battle again till it was the time of evensong. Nor could any of those that beheld say which was the likelier to be conqueror, for both had given and suffered many grievous blows, and their shields and armour were sorely hacked and hewn. The knight of the Red Lands was a wily and cunning fighter, and Sir Fairhands, little by little, discerned his craft, but it cost him dear to learn it. Then again by consent they rested awhile, and their pages unlaced their harness, so that they might be cooled by the wind. Then Sir Fairhands, looking up, saw Dame Lyones at a window, with so smiling a face that he took great heart at the sight and bade the knight of Red Lands come on again. "That will I," said he. So their pages laced up again their helmets and their harness, and they fell to fighting again. Then

the knight of the siege dealt Sir Fairhands a cunning blow within the hand so that his sword fell from it, and, after this, so strong a buffet on the helmet that he fell to the earth. Then his adversary threw himself upon him to hold him down. But the damsel Linet cried aloud, "Where is your courage, Sir Fairhands? My sister weeps to see you in such case so as to break her heart." When Sir Fairhands heard this he leapt up with great strength, and got his feet again, and caught his sword in his hand. Then there was another battle, but Sir Fairhands redoubled his strokes, and in no long time had smitten the sword out of his adversary's hand, and had laid him even with the ground. So the knight of the Red Lands yielded himself, and prayed for mercy. But Sir Fairhands bethought him of the knights that he had seen so shamefully hanged and said, "I cannot give you mercy, seeing you have put so many knights to a shameful death." "Hear now the cause," said the other. "Once I loved a lady whose brother was slain by Sir Lancelot or Sir Gawaine, and I made her a promise that I would fight ever with King Arthur's knights, and that I would so put to death whomsoever I should vanquish." And many nobles and knights came up and entreated of the conqueror that he would spare the knight, saying, "It were better for you to have him and us

for your men. And if you slay him it will not undo the evil that he has done." Then said Sir Fairhands, "I am loath to slay the knight, though he has done many shameful deeds ; and indeed I blame him the less because he has done these things at a lady's bidding. Therefore I give him pardon, but on these conditions : First, that he yield to the Lady Lyones, and make amends to her for all his trespasses against her. Second, that he go to the court of King Arthur and beg forgiveness of Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawaine for his ill-will towards them." "This will I do," said the knight.

CHAPTER VII

THE ADVENTURE OF SIR GARETH (*concluded*)

THEY carried Sir Fairhands to a pavilion that was set up in the meadow before the castle, and there he rested ten days, the while the damsel Linet searched his wounds, and staunched the bleeding of them, and put healing salves upon them. And when the ten days were past, Sir Fairhands armed himself, and mounted his horse, and took his spear, and rode to the gate of the castle. But as he came near he perceived that the drawbridge was pulled up and the gate close shut. It made him marvel not a little that he was not suffered to enter the castle ; but looking up, he saw at a certain window that was high in the wall the Lady Lyones, who said to him, “ Go thy way, Sir Fairhands ; my love you shall not have fully yet, but when you are in the full fellowship of the worthiest knights, you shall have it.” Thereupon the knight rode away sore troubled in mind, for he had persuaded himself that he had already won this lady’s love.

On the morrow he departed, and rode till it was noon, and then laid himself down to sleep by a great water, and gave his horse to the dwarf and commanded him to watch.

But the Lady Lyones was as little content as he, for indeed she loved the knight with all her heart. Therefore she said to her brother Sir Gringamor, "Now, brother, as you love me, ride after this knight, and wait until you can come upon him sleeping, for I am sure that he will lie down in heaviness in some place and fall asleep. Do you then steal away his dwarf, for our sister Linet has showed me that this same dwarf can show us of what race his master comes. Steal him therefore, and bring him to your castle, where I will have him in examination, for I can never be at rest till I have made myself assured on this matter." "It shall be done as you desire," said Sir Gringamor.

So he rode without tarrying for so much as an hour till he came to the water whereby Sir Fairhands lay sleeping with his head upon his shield. And when he saw that the knight was fast in his slumber, he came very stealthily behind the dwarf, and caught him under his arm, and rode away with him to his castle with all the haste that he might. But the dwarf cried to his master that he should help him, and Sir Fairhands woke at the crying, but not so soon as to hinder the deed.

Only he saw that the knight had black armour, and the trappings of his horse black. Then he buckled on his helmet, and took up his shield, and, mounting on his horse, rode after this black knight, but wandered from the way, straying into fields and marshes and valleys, so that both he and his horse were likely to perish. After a while, he came on a countryman, whom he saluted, asking him whether, perchance, he had seen a black knight, carrying a dwarf behind him, "and the dwarf," said he, "would doubtless be complaining." "Yea," said the countryman, "I have seen such a pair, a knight in black harness and a dwarf complaining; he is called Sir Gringamor, and he has a castle not far from hence. But I counsel you not to follow him, for he is a dangerous man to deal with, if you be not friends to him."

By this time Sir Gringamor was come to his castle, carrying the dwarf. When the man was brought into the presence of Dame Lyones and her sister Linet, they questioned him closely of his master, where he was born, and of what lineage he came. "And know," said the Dame, "that if you tell us not, you shall never escape from this castle, but shall be kept in prison till your life's end." "Madam," said the dwarf, "I refuse not to tell his name, and of what lineage he is come. He is a king's son, and his mother is

sister to King Arthur, and he is brother to the good knight Sir Gawaine, and his name is Sir Gareth. And now that I have told you these things, let me go, I pray you, to my master, for he will not depart till he have me again, and if he be thwarted he will make much ado." "As for that," said Sir Gringamor, "let it be as it may. We will go to our dinner." So they went to their dinner with much content. And as they sat at meat, the Lady Linet said to her sister "Well may he be a king's son, for a gentler man I never saw. I railed upon him, calling him kitchen knave and the like, for many days while we rode together, but he answered me never a rough word."

Now the knights that had yielded themselves to Sir Fairhands, who shall be called henceforth by his true name of Sir Gareth, went to King Arthur, according as they had been bidden, and swore fealty to him. First came the Green Knight with fifty that held of him, and after him the Red Knight with sixty, and after him, again, the Blue Knight, with a hundred, and they all yielded themselves to the King, telling him how they had been overcome by a knight that had a damsel with him, and was called Sir Fairhands. "Now," said the King, "I marvel much of what lineage he is. For twelve months he was here, and he was but poorly

cared for, and Sir Kaye called him Fairhands in scorn."

While the King talked with the three knights, Green, Red, and Blue, came in Sir Lancelot, and said, "There is come a very goodly lord, having five hundred knights with him." So the King went out of the hall, and the lord saluted him in courteous fashion. "What is your will," said the King, "and on what errand are you come?" The lord answered, "I am called the Red Knight of the Red Lands, but my name is Sir Ironside. I am sent hither by a knight that calls himself Sir Fairhands. He overcame me in battle, fighting hand to hand, and this no man has done for thirty years, and, having overcome me, charged me that I should yield myself to you." "You are welcome," said the King, "and the more because you have been a long time enemy to me and my knights." "That is so," answered the lord, "but henceforth I am at your command, and so are all my knights, and we will serve you as best we can." Said the King, "Ironside, if you will hold of me, I will make you a knight of the Round Table, but you must leave your murderous ways." "That will I henceforth," said the lord, "for indeed I followed them at a lady's behest, that would be avenged of her enemy. And I would fain ask pardon of Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawaine, for chiefly I

did these things out of ill-will to them." "They are here," said the King. So the lord craved pardon of Sir Lancelot and Sir Gawaine, and they granted it to him right generously.

After this they all sat down to meat, and as they were sitting, came in the Queen of Orkney, the King's sister. And Sir Gawaine, with his brothers, knelt before her and asked her blessing, for they had not seen their mother for the space of fifteen years. But the Queen spake with a loud voice to King Arthur, saying, "What have you done with Sir Gareth, my youngest son? He was with you for the space of a year, and you made him a kitchen knave, which was truly a shameful thing." "I knew him not," said Gawaine to his mother. "Nor I," said the King, "but this I know, that he has proved himself a very worthy knight, nor shall I ever rest till I have found him." But the Queen did not abate her wrath. "You did ill," she said to her brother and her sons, "when you kept my son Gareth in the kitchen, and fed him like a poor hog." "Fair sister," answered the King, "you must know that we knew him not, neither I nor his brethren. And, sister, why did you not warn me of his coming? For when he first came he was leaning on the shoulders of two, as if he could not go alone, and he asked me three gifts—first, meat for twelve months,

and second, when the twelve months were past, the adventure of the damsel Linet, and the adventure being given him, that he should be knighted by Sir Lancelot. All these things he had. But because he asked for sustenance, there were many here that deemed that he was not of a noble house." "Know, brother," said the Queen, "that I sent him well armed and horsed, and finely clad, with plenty of gold and silver." "Of these things," said the King, "we saw nought in this place. Only when he was about to depart, there came one who said that there was a dwarf waiting for him who had brought him armour and a good horse. And we, marvelling how he should be possessed of such things, judged that he must be come of a noble house." "He had ever strange ways," said she, "since he came to man's estate. But he was faithful to his promise. I marvel that Sir Kaye mocked him and called him Fairhands. Yet, in truth, Sir Kaye did not greatly err therein, for there is not on the earth a more fair-handed man." Then said the King, "Enough of these things; by the grace of God he shall be found. Then we shall be all merry, for he has shown himself to be a very worthy knight, and I am right glad to know that he is of my kindred."

"We will go seek him," said Gawaine and his brethren with one voice. "There is no

need," said one of the knights that stood by. "Let the King send a messenger unto the Dame Lyones, bidding her come straightway to the court. And when she is come, she will give you the best counsel how you may find him." So the King sent a messenger with all speed to the Dame Lyones.

And now shall be told how things had fared with the Dame and Sir Gareth.

While Sir Gringamor and his sisters sat at meat after that the dwarf had told them of his master's name and lineage, came Sir Gareth in great heat to the castle, having his sword drawn in his hand, and crying with a loud voice, "Sir Gringamor, traitor that you are, give me my dwarf again, or, on the word of a knight, I will do you all the harm I can." But Sir Gringamor, looking out of a window, said, "Leave your boasting, Sir Gareth; for all your high words, you get not your dwarf again." Then Sir Gareth, in great anger, cried again, "Come down, Sir Gringamor, and bring the dwarf with you, and we will do battle for him." "So will I," said Sir Gringamor, "but you get him not by threatening."

Then said Dame Lyones, "Fair brother, I would that he had his dwarf again, for now that I have heard who he is, why should I keep him from his own? Remember, brother, that he has

done much for me, delivering me from Sir Ironside, so that I owe him service beyond all other knights that live. And indeed I love him well, and would fain speak with him, only that he should not know who I am, but should deem that I am some strange lady." "Since I know your will, fair sister," answered Sir Gringamor, "I will do as you desire." So he went down to the gate of the castle, and said to Sir Gareth, "Fair sir, I pray your pardon for all that I have done amiss, and will make such amends as you shall ask. But now, I pray you, alight, and enter, and make such cheer as this place can afford." Then said Sir Gareth, "And shall I have my dwarf again?" "That you shall," answered Sir Gringamor, "and all other pleasure that I can do you, now that I know you, who you are and what noble deeds you have done," and lo! the dwarf stood there, ready to take his master's horse. "I have had many evil adventures for your sake," said Sir Gareth to the dwarf. And Sir Gringamor took him by the hand and led him into the hall of the castle, where was Sir Gringamor's wife.

Presently Dame Lyones came into the hall, arrayed like a princess, and exceeding fair to look upon. And Sir Gareth said many times to himself as he looked upon her, "Now I would that the lady of the Castle Perilous were as fair

as is this dame." Then they talked together that day, and other days also, and Sir Gareth loved the lady ever more and more, and the lady also, as he deemed, loved him. Nor was it long before she told him that she was no other than the Lady of Castle Perilous, which when he heard he was well content, for now he seemed to have his wish in all things. Then the damsel Linet joined their company, and these three, with Sir Gringamor and his wife, were a very merry company.

After awhile came King Arthur's messenger, with the King's command to the Lady Lyones that she should come to his court. When she received this message, she said, "Ride fast to King Arthur, and tell him that I will follow with all speed." Then she went to see Sir Gringamor and Sir Gareth, and told them the matter. "The King has done this for my sake," said Sir Gareth. "Tell me then," said Dame Lyones, "what I should do." He answered, "I would not any should know where I am, for my mother and my brethren will come to seek me. Now, therefore, my dear love, give this counsel to the King, that you should call by his good leave an assembly of all the knights in this realm, and that whosoever shall prove himself to be the best man, he shall have you to wife, and shall have your lands with you. And if it so chance that he be married

already, then that he have the honour of victory, and a gold crown, with precious stones to the worth of one thousand pounds, and a white falcon." "That is well thought," said Sir Gringamor and his sisters.

Then the Dame Lyones rode to the court of King Arthur. And when she was come thither, she said, "Where Sir Gareth is, I know not; but let me call an assembly of knights against the festival of the Assumption, and it shall be that he who bears himself best in the tournament, I will take him for my husband. Do you be there, Sir King, with your knights, and I will set my knights against you, and be assured that Sir Gareth will be there."

After this the Dame Lyones returned to the Isle of Avalon where she dwelt, and told her brother and Sir Gareth what she had done. But said Sir Gareth, "I have never been made whole of my hurts, so that I shall not be able to bear myself as I would at this tournament." "Be of good cheer," said the damsel Linet. "I will warrant, with a salve that I have, to make you whole within fifteen days." And so she did, and Sir Gareth was healed by her salve, so that now he was as strong and lusty as ever he was in his life. Said the Dame Lyones, "Send now to Sir Ironside, and to Sir Persaunt of Ind, and to his brothers, the Red Knight and the Green ;

for we shall have much ado to hold our own against King Arthur and his company." So they sent for these knights and for many more besides. It was a right goodly gathering that was met on the Feast of the Assumption at the Castle Perilous. Before the jousting began, Sir Gareth said to the Dame Lyones and to her brother Sir Gringamor, and to the other lords of his party, "Now do not tell who I am, and show me no honour whereby I may be known." So they promised, and Dame Lyones said to him, "Take now this ring and wear it. The virtue of it is this—first, that it will change him who wears it to divers colours, and second, that he shall lose no blood. But I charge you after the tournament that I have it again, for it makes me fairer than I am." So Sir Gareth took the ring with much thankfulness.

Now it were long to tell how these good knights jousted together. Many bore themselves right well, but none so well as did Sir Gareth. And all marvelled at him the more because they saw him at one time in green, and at another time in blue, and how with every course he seemed to change his colour and cognisance, so that they deemed him to be the same and yet not the same. And as the day drew to the end, King Arthur said, "This knight of many colours is a marvellous good knight," and he called Sir

Lancelot and said to him, "Sir Lancelot, have a trial of arms with this knight of many colours." But Sir Lancelot made answer, "Not so, my lord; I had rather forbear him at this time, for he has had great travail this day, and when a knight bears himself so well, it is ill becoming that another should hinder him from the honour that is his due. And, maybe, he doeth this for the love of some lady, who, perchance, loves him well. As for me, therefore, he shall have the honour this day. Were it in my power to keep him from it, yet would I not do it."

Not long after, Sir Gareth went on one side that he might have his helmet set right, and also that he might drink a draught. So the dwarf said to him, "Give me the ring while you drink, lest, perchance, you lose it." So Sir Gareth gave him the ring, nor did it come into his mind to take it when he went back to the field. And the dwarf was glad, because he was sure that now all would know Sir Gareth; and indeed so it befell, and all men knew that none had borne himself so bravely in the tournament as he.

After the jousting was ended, King Arthur said to his nephew, Sir Gareth, "Love you this lady, Dame Lyones?" "That I do," said he, "with all my heart." And the King said to the Dame, "And love you him?" "My lord King," she said, "know you that he is my first love and my last,

and if I may not have him, I promise you that I will have none." Then said the King, "I would not hinder your loves, no, not for my very crown. You shall have my goodwill to the very uttermost." So likewise said the Queen of Orkney, Sir Gareth's mother.

On Michaelmas Day the Archbishop of Canterbury made the wedding between Sir Gareth and Dame Lyones with all solemnity. Also Sir Gaheris, which was Sir Gareth's brother, wedded the damsel Linet. And after the wedding the Green Knight prayed that he might be Sir Gareth's chamberlain, and the Red Knight that he might be his butler, and Sir Persaunt that he might be his chief server, and Sir Ironside that he might be his carver.

All these things did he grant right courteously. Thus ends the adventure of Sir Gareth.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR LANCELOT

ON a certain day it came into the heart of Sir Lancelot, who had sat at ease for a long time, to go forth from the court and seek adventures. So he bade his brother Sir Lionel make ready, saying, "We will seek adventures together." So they armed themselves, and mounted their horses, and rode into a forest that was hard by Caerleon. And having passed through the forest, they came to a great plain ; and now it was the time of noon, and it was hot, and Sir Lancelot greatly desired to sleep. Sir Lionel saw a great apple-tree in a hedge hard by, and said, "Brother, here is a fair shade, where we may rest us and our horses." So they alighted, and tied their horses to trees, and Sir Lancelot laid him down to sleep with his helmet under his head, but Sir Lionel watched. After a while Sir Lionel espied three knights flying as fast as they could, and one knight pursuing them. And Sir Lionel thought to

himself that he had never seen a bigger man, or a better favoured, or a better armed. This strong knight overtook one of them that fled, and smote him to the ground. In a short space he came up with the second, to whom he dealt such a blow that both horse and man fell to the ground. This done, he rode against the third knight, and drave him from his saddle so strongly that he fell a full spear's length from his horse's tail. When he had so vanquished the three, he lighted from his horse, and bound them with the bridle-reins of their own horses. Then said Sir Lionel to himself, "I will myself make trial of this knight," and he untied his horse from the tree, Sir Lancelot being fast asleep all this while. So Sir Lionel mounted his horse, and rode after the strong knight, and bade him turn. Thereupon the strong knight turned, and rode at Sir Lionel, and smote him so hard that both man and horse were borne to the ground. This done, the knight alighted from his horse, and threw Sir Lionel over his horse's neck with the three other knights, and so rode away to his own castle. Then having stripped them and whipped them with thorns, he threw them into a deep dungeon, where lay already many knights, making a great moan over their hard fate.

Meanwhile Sir Ector de Maris, who also was brother to Sir Lancelot and Sir Lionel, found

that these two were gone seeking adventures, and was much troubled to have been left behind. So he armed himself, and mounted his horse, and rode into the forest. There he met a forester, and said to him, "Friend, know you where any adventures may be found?" "Yes," said the man; "hard by here there is a castle, with a ditch round about it, and a ford where horses may drink, and by the ford a fair tree, and on the tree there hang the shields that many knights have borne. Also on the tree there hangs a basin of copper. Strike upon that basin with your spear, and you shall have as fair an adventure as you can desire." "Thanks, friend," said Sir Ector, and so departed, and presently came to the tree, whereon he saw many shields, and among them the shield of his brother, Sir Lionel, and the shields of other divers knights of the Round Table. Thereat he was very wroth, and smote on the basin with his spear as he had been mad; and then, riding into the water, suffered his horse to drink. Meanwhile there came a knight behind him, and bade him come forth from the water and make him ready to fight. So Sir Ector turned him about and made at the other knight, and dealt him so strong a blow that his horse turned about three times. "That is well done," said the strong knight, "you have stricken me right well." Therewith he drave at

Sir Ector at full speed, and caught him under his right arm, and bare him out of his saddle, and riding with him to the hall of his castle threw him down upon the floor. Then said the strong knight—his name was Sir Turquine—to Sir Ector, “You have done more than any knight has done to me for these twelve years past. Therefore I will grant you your life, only you must swear to be my man for the rest of your days.” “That will I never swear,” answered Sir Ector. “Then I repent me of my promise,” said Sir Turquine, and whipped him as he had done his fellows, and cast him down into the dungeon. And when Sir Ector saw his brother Lionel he was much troubled, and said, “Where is Lancelot, our brother?” “Alas!” said Sir Lionel, “I left him asleep under an apple-tree, but what has befallen him I know not. If he cannot help us, we are in evil case, for there is no knight in all the world so strong as is this Sir Turquine.”

Meanwhile there came by the place where Sir Lancelot lay sleeping four queens, riding on four white mules, over whom four knights bare on four spears a canopy of green silk to the end that the sun should not burn them. When they saw the sleeper’s face they knew that it was Sir Lancelot, and Queen Morgan le Fay, who was a great enchantress, said to her companions,

“We will put such an enchantment on him that he shall not wake for the space of six hours. And when he shall awake he shall choose which of us four he will love.” So Morgan le Fay, using certain enchantments that she had, cast him into a deep sleep, and caused carry him into the castle, which was Castle Chariot by name, and lay him in a chamber. At sunset she sent a damsel to take him his supper. When the damsel saw him she asked him how he fared. “That I know not, fair damsel,” said he, “nor do I know how I came into this castle except it was by enchantment.” “Be of courage,” said she, “and if you are so good a knight as men say you are, you shall know more of this matter by to-morrow early.” Therewith she departed. Early on the morrow came the four queens, very richly apparelled and right fair to look upon. Queen Morgan le Fay said to him, “We know who you are, that you are Sir Lancelot, a very noble knight. Choose now one of us four whom to love, or know that you shall be kept in prison here to the very end of your days.” “I will have none of you,” said Sir Lancelot; “ye are false witches, all of you, and you have my hatred, not my love.” “Is this your answer?” said Morgan le Fay. “It is,” said he. At noon came the damsel again, bringing him his dinner, and asked him how he fared. “So ill,” said he,

“as I have never fared before in all my days.”

“That grieves me,” said the damsel. “Nevertheless, if you will be ruled by me, I can help you out of your distress; only you must make me a certain promise. Know therefore that these four queens are passing wroth with you because they hold you to have scorned them; and, if they can, they will do you a damage. Now if you will promise to help my father on the Tuesday that comes next, I will deliver you. For on Tuesday there will be a tournament between him and the King of North Gales, as of a truth there was also on Tuesday last past. But on Tuesday last past my father was driven from the field by three knights of Arthur’s court. Promise therefore to help him, and I will deliver you.”

“Fair maiden,” said Sir Lancelot, “tell me who is your father.”

“He is a very worthy knight,” she made answer, “and his name is King Bagdemagus.”

“I know him right well,” said Sir Lancelot, “for a noble king and a good knight, and you shall have me at your service on the day aforesaid.”

“Sir,” said the damsel, “be ready betimes to-morrow, for I will set you free, and deliver to you your horse and armour and spear.”

“I will be ready,” said Sir Lancelot, “as I am a true knight.”

On the morrow she set him free, having unlocked twelve locks by which his prison was made fast, and gave him

his horse and his armour and his spear, and bade him ride. That day he missed his road, but on the morrow he came to an abbey of white monks, of which King Bagdemagus's daughter had told him. Now the damsel had gone before to this said abbey, and when she heard the horse's hoofs in the courtyard, she looked out of a window, and saw that it was Sir Lancelot. Then she went down, and sent men to take his horse and put it in a stable, and also to conduct him to a fair chamber, where he might unarm. Also she sent him a long gown, and after a while she came herself, and made him as good cheer as ever was, saying that of all the knights in the world he was the most welcome. Also she sent in all haste to her father the King, for he was lodging about twelve miles from the said abbey, and he came before sunset with a goodly company of knights. So soon as he had lighted from his horse, he went into Sir Lancelot's chamber, and embraced him, and gave him as good greeting as could be. Then Sir Lancelot told the King how he had been betrayed, and how his brother Sir Lionel had gone from him he knew not whither. "And I myself," he said, "should even now be in evil case, but that your daughter has delivered me out of prison." "Then," said the King, "you will help me without fail on the Tuesday that next comes," "That will I," answered Sir

Lancelot, "for so have I promised to the lady your daughter, to wit, that I would do all service to her and to her kindred. But tell me, what knights are there of the King's court that were with the King of North Gales and put your knights to shame?" "They were three," answered the King, "Sir Mador, and Sir Mordred, and Sir Galahatine. Against these neither I nor my knights could by any means hold up." "Sir," answered Sir Lancelot, "I have heard say that this tournament will be held some three miles from this abbey. Choose you then three of your knights, such as you can best trust, and let them have white shields, without any device thereon, and let there be a white shield for me. We four, being so equipped, will come out of a little wood between the two parties and fall on the front of our adversaries and vex them all that we may, and it shall not be known by any who I am." So they rested that day, being Sunday, and the King departed to his own house.

The next day there came the three knights having three white shields, and another for Sir Lancelot, and the next day, again, being Tuesday, very early they disposed themselves in a little leafy wood near to where the tournament should be.

Then, the lists being set, with scaffolds round

about where the lords and ladies might sit to behold the jousting, came the King of North Gales with eight-score lances, the three knights of the Round Table being by themselves, and King Bagdemagus with four-score lances. The two parties set their spears and jousted, and twelve of King Bagdemagus's party were slain, and six of the King of North Gales, so that these last had by far the better of the day.

Thereupon Sir Lancelot charged from out of the little wood where he had lain hidden. With one spear he bare down five knights, breaking the backs of four, and the King of North Gales himself he smote to the earth with so strong a blow that the King's thigh was broken. This the three knights of the Table beheld, and Sir Mador said, "That is a shrewd guest; I must have at him." So he charged him with all his might, and the two met, and Sir Lancelot bare both horse and man to the ground, so that Sir Mador's shoulder was put out. Sir Mordred said, "Sir Mador has had a shrewd fall; I must try my fortune." So he ran at Sir Lancelot, but he was aware of his coming, and gave him such a buffet with his spear that the saddle-girths burst, and the man was driven over his horse's tail, and his helmet was buried in the earth a foot or more. So sore was the fall that Sir Mordred's neck came nigh to being broken, and he lay long time in a

swoon. Last came Sir Galahatine at Sir Lancelot; he brake his spear and Sir Lancelot brake his; and they fell to fighting with their swords, and gave and received many grievous blows. And Sir Lancelot waxed very wroth, and smote Sir Galahatine so strongly on the helmet that the blood gushed both from his nose and his mouth and from his ears also, and his horse ran away with him, and he fell to the ground. So the three knights were vanquished. And afterwards Sir Lancelot bare down with one spear sixteen knights, some both man and horse, and some the man and not the horse. Nor was there one of them but was hit so severely that he could bear arms no more that day. And when this spear was broken, he gat him another, and with this he smote down twelve knights, and some of them were wounded so grievously that they never throve again after that day. After this the party of the King of North Gales would not joust any more. The prize, therefore, was given to King Bagdemagus.

This done, each King departed to his own house with such knights as were left to him, and Sir Lancelot rode with King Bagdemagus to his castle and had good cheer with him and his daughter.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR LANCELOT (*continued*)

ON the morrow Sir Lancelot said to the King, "Now I will go seek my brother Sir Lionel, who left me while I slept." So he mounted his horse, and when he was about to depart, he said to the King's daughter, "If at any time you have need of my service, let me have knowledge thereof, and I will help you as I am a true knight." So he departed, and by chance he came into the same forest in which he fell into a deep sleep. There he met a damsel riding on a white palfrey in the highway. And when they had saluted each other, he said, "Fair damsel, know you of any adventures in these parts?" "Sir Knight," answered the damsel, "adventures there are, but you dare not make trial of them." "Nay," said Sir Lancelot, "why should I not dare, for I am come hither for adventure's sake." Then she answered, "You seem to be a good knight; therefore if you dare meet one that is the very

strongest knight that you ever found, come with me and I will show you such an adventure as never you had before ; but tell me first your name." "Damsel," said he, "I make no ado to tell my name ; 'tis Lancelot du Lake." "Sir," said she, "your look promises well, but the knight that dwells hereby will not be overmatched by any man save, it maybe, by you. His name is Sir Turquine, and he has in hold three-score and four knights of King Arthur's court, all of whom he has overcome with his own hand. And when you have done this errand, then you must promise me, as you are a true knight, to help other damsels that are oppressed by false knights." "So will I do," said he ; "but bring me first to this strong knight of whom you speak." So she brought him to the ford, and to the tree whereon the basin hung. So Sir Lancelot let his horse drink, and smote the basin with the end of his spear so mightily that the bottom thereof fell out. And this he did for a good while, but saw nought. Then he left the ford, and rode to the gates of the manor. Here he was aware of a great knight that drave a horse before him, and across the neck of the horse lay a knight ; and when Sir Lancelot looked he saw that it was Sir Gaheris, brother to Sir Gawaine, and a knight of the Round Table. "Now, fair damsel," said he, "yonder I see a knight bound. He is a

fellow of mine, and brother to Sir Gawaine ; him will I deliver, by the grace of God, so only his vanquisher sits not tighter in the saddle than I. And I will deliver also all the prisoners that this fellow has ; among whom, I am well assured, there are two brethren of mine."

By this time the two knights had seen each other. "Fair knight," said Sir Lancelot, "let that wounded man rest awhile, while we two prove our strength together. It has been shown me that you do great shame to the knights of the Round Table. So I bid you defend yourself." "If you are of the Round Table," said Sir Turquine, "then I defy you and all your fellowship." "That is too proudly said," said Sir Lancelot.

Then the two laid their spears in rest, and charged together with all the speed they might, and smote each other in the very midst of their shields, and that so mightily that their horses' backs were broken under them. Then, so soon as they had got them clear of their horses, they put their shields before them, and drew their swords and came together in great fury, dealing each to the other blows so mighty that their harness could not wholly turn them. So they fought for the space of two hours, watching each if he could spy a bare place in his adversary's armour. Then they both grew breathless, and rested awhile, leaning

upon their swords. Said Sir Turquine, "Hold thy hand, fellow, awhile, and tell me what I shall ask you." "Say on," said Lancelot. Then said Sir Turquine, "You are the biggest man that ever I met and the best breathed, and greatly like to the one knight whom I hate above all others. So you be not he, I will willingly have peace with you, aye, and for your sake deliver up all the prisoners that I have, three-score men and four. Only tell me your name, and you and I will be fellows, nor will I fail you so long as I shall live." "'Tis well said," answered Sir Lancelot, "but if I may be your friend, tell me who that knight may be whom you hate above all others." "Truly," said Sir Turquine, "it is Sir Lancelot du Lake, for he slew my brother, Sir Carados, who was as good a knight as ever lived. Therefore I except him from all other knights, to the end that, if we meet, we part not till one or other shall have come to his end. That I promise and vow. And verily, for his sake, I have slain a hundred knights, and maimed as many so utterly that they could not help themselves any more. Also I have caused many to die in my prison, wherein I hold at this saying three-score and four, all of whom I will straightway deliver thereout so that you tell me your name, and you be not Sir Lancelot." "Now, I see," answered Sir Lancelot, "that I am such a man in your

eyes that you are willing to have peace with me, or war. But know, Sir Knight, that I am Lancelot du Lake, son of King Ban of Benwick, and Knight of the Round Table. And being he, I defy you to the uttermost." "Lancelot," said Sir Turquine, "you are as welcome to me as ever was knight, for now we shall never part till one of us be dead." Thereupon they ran furiously together as might two bulls, and fought for the space of two hours. And Sir Turquine gave Sir Lancelot many wounds, so that all the earth thereabout was sprinkled with blood, but he himself was very faint, and drew back somewhat and held his shield low for very weariness. This Sir Lancelot espied and leapt upon him fiercely as a lion, and laid hold on him by the top of his helmet, and so bringing him down on his knee, plucked off his helmet and smote his neck asunder.

The fight being thus ended, Sir Lancelot said to the damsel, "Damsel, I am ready to go with you whithersoever you will, but I have not a horse." "Fair sir," said the damsel, "I counsel you to take the horse of this wounded knight; and bid him go to the manor, where he shall deliver all the prisoners that lie there in hold." Thereupon Sir Lancelot went to Sir Gaheris and prayed him to lend him his horse. "Fair knight," answered Sir Gaheris, "you have my horse at your com-

mand, for you have this day saved both him and me, and I have seen this day how you have slain one that was the mightiest man in all the world save yourself only. And now I pray you to tell me your name?" "My name," said he, "is Lancelot du Lake; and I am bound to help you for my lord King Arthur's sake, and also for Sir Gawaine's sake, your brother, for I love him. Go now to the manor, I pray you, and deliver the knights that you will find there, for there be many knights in hold that are of the Round Table, for I saw their shields there, as Sir Kaye's and Sir Alidore's, and the shields of my two brothers, Sir Ector de Maris and Sir Lionel. Greet them well in my name, and bid them take such stuff as they can find, and go to the court and abide there till I come, for I hope to be present there by the Feast of Pentecost. But now I must needs ride with this damsel, for so have I promised."

So saying, he departed, and Sir Gaheris went into the manor, and found there a yeoman porter, keeping many keys. "Now give me the keys," said he to the porter; and when the man said him nay, he cast him to the ground so strongly that his eyes started out of his head. Then he took the keys and opened the prison, and let out the prisoners. And every man loosened his fellow's bonds. They were all for thanking Sir Gaheris when they saw him, thinking that he had slain Sir

Turquine. But he would have none of their thanks. "'Twas Sir Lancelot," said he, "that slew the man with his hands, as I myself beheld with mine own eyes. And now he greets you well, and prays you go to the court; and his brothers, Sir Lionel and Sir Ector, he bids attend him at the court." "That will not we do," said the two. "No, nor I," said Sir Kaye; "we will find him ere we come to the court." Then all the knights searched for their horses and their armour and all that they had, and every knight found his own. And Sir Kaye said, "We have not had a good meal this many a day. Now here is provision for this day at the least." So venison was roasted and baked for them. And after supper some abode in the place, but Sir Ector and Sir Lionel and Sir Kaye rode after Lancelot.

Meanwhile Sir Lancelot rode with the damsel, and as he rode he asked her what service she asked of him, and she answered, "Sir, there is a villain knight that haunts this way, who does as ill by gentlewomen and damsels as Sir Turquine was wont to do by knights." "Then he does great shame to his order of knighthood," said Sir Lancelot, "and 'tis a pity that he yet lives. But do you ride on by yourself, and I will keep in covert, and if he trouble or distress you, I will teach him to order himself better." So the damsel rode on, as she had been alone, and anon came a

knight out of the wood and caught her from her horse. Thereupon she cried out, and Sir Lancelot came up and caught the man such a buffet as clave him to the throat.

After a while he came in his riding to a long bridge, where there leapt out upon him a foul churl that smote his horse upon the nose, crying, "Why pass you here without my license?" "I ride as I please," said Sir Lancelot, and when the churl smote at him with a great club of iron, he put aside the stroke full easily and slew the knave with a single stroke. Then he was aware of a company of people who cried out, "A worse deed you have never done, slaying our chief porter;" and when he came at the bridge-end to a castle, with a fair green court in the midst, he saw much people who called to him from the doors and windows round about saying, "Fair knight, you have had ill luck to come to this place," and as they spake there came suddenly upon him two giants horrible to see, with great clubs in their hands. These two Sir Lancelot slew with little ado, and so going into the hall found three-score ladies who kneeled to him and said, "Fair sir, we have been prisoners to these giants for seven years, and though we be gentlewomen born and of good estate we have worked all manner of silk-work for our meat. Now blessed be the day that brought you hither. But tell us your name. Many

knights have essayed to deliver us from this bondage, but these giants have had the better of them all, save you only." "My name," said he, "is Lancelot du Lake."

Thereafter he went his way, and rode through many waste places and crossed many rivers, and, for the most part, had but ill lodging. After certain days he came to a fair mansion where he was well lodged, the house being cared for by an aged gentlewoman who so ordered it that both he and his horse were well looked to. And when the hour came, his host brought him to a bed-chamber that was above the gate. There Sir Lancelot laid him down, and anon fell asleep. But in a short space of time there was a great knocking at the gate which awaked him. And he, looking out, saw three knights that came riding after one man, and lashed at him with their swords, and he, turning upon them, defended himself in full knightly fashion. Said Sir Lancelot to himself, "Now will I help this single knight; 'tis a shame to see three on one; did they slay him, I were a partaker in his death." So he put on his armour, and let himself down by a sheet from his window, and cried with a loud voice, "Turn ye hither, knights, and leave fighting with that man." Then the three left the one, who, indeed, was Sir Kaye, and struck many strokes at Sir Lancelot. But when Sir Kaye addressed himself to help him,

Sir Lancelot would have none of it. "If you will have my help," said he, "let me deal with them alone." Thereupon Sir Kaye stood aside, and Sir Lancelot, within six strokes, had smitten the whole three to the earth. And when they cried with one voice, "Sir, we yield us to you," Sir Lancelot answered, "Yield not to me ; yield to the seneschal, so will I save your lives ; but if ye will not, ye die." "Nay," said they, "we chased Sir Kaye hither, and had overcome him, but for you ; it is not reason that we should yield us to Sir Kaye." "As ye will," said Sir Lancelot, "choose whether ye will live or die ; but if ye would live ye must yield to Sir Kaye." "We will do as you bid," said the three. Then said Sir Lancelot, "At Whitsuntide next coming, go to the court of King Arthur and yield you to Queen Guinevere, and say that Sir Kaye sent you to be prisoners." "That will we do," said the three, and swore upon their swords that they would perform their promise. Thereupon Sir Lancelot suffered them to depart. Great thanks did Sir Kaye give to him, but Sir Lancelot answered him, "I did nothing beyond that to which I was bound, and you are welcome. But now take your rest." So the two supped together, and slept in the same chamber. But on the morrow Sir Lancelot arose, Sir Kaye being yet very deep in his sleep, and took Sir Kaye's armour and his shield, and so away. After awhile Sir

Kaye also arose, and perceived that Sir Lancelot had departed, having both his armour and his horse. Thereupon Sir Kaye said to himself, "Now am I sure that Sir Lancelot will bring sundry knights of the King's court to trouble, for they will be bold when they see him, thinking that it is I. So will he beguile them ; but as for me, because of his armour and shield, I am well sure that I shall ride in peace." So Sir Kaye also thanked his host for his good entertainment and rode away.

CHAPTER X

THE ADVENTURES OF SIR LANCELOT (*continued*)

SIR LANCELOT rode a long way through a forest, and came to a fair country of many meadows and rivers, and on one of the rivers was a long bridge, and on the bridge stood three pavilions of silk, and without the pavilions hung three white shields on shafts of spears, and at each pavilion's door were three squires. But Sir Lancelot passed by with never a word.

When he was passed, said the knights whose were the three pavilions one to another, "That is the proud Sir Kaye; he deems that there is no knight so good as he; yet the contrary has oft been proved." Then said one of the three, Sir Gaunter by name, "I will ride after him and make trial of him, for all his pride, and ye shall see how I fare." Thereupon he armed himself, and hung his shield upon his shoulder, and mounted his horse, and took his spear in his hand, and rode after the false Sir Kaye. When

he was come near, he cried, "Stay, proud knight, Sir Kaye, else you shall not pass." So Sir Lancelot turned; and the two came together with all their might, and Sir Gaunter's spear broke, but Sir Lancelot bare both man and horse to the ground. This his two brethren seeing, said to each other, "Yonder is not Sir Kaye, but is bigger than he." And one of them, Sir Gilmere by name, said, "I dare lay my head, he has slain Sir Kaye, and taken his horse and harness." "May be," said the third of the knights, Sir Reynold, "but we must mount upon our horses and rescue our brother; we shall have much ado to match him, for I judge him by his look to be Sir Lancelot, or Sir Tristram, or Sir Pelleas." So they took their horses and overtook Sir Lancelot. First Sir Gilmere ran at him, but Sir Lancelot smote him so strongly that he lay in a swoon. Then said Sir Reynold, "You are a strong man, Sir Knight, and have slain my two brothers, I trow, for which thing my heart rises against you; yet, but for mine honour, I would fain leave you alone. Nevertheless, I must needs take part with them. Therefore keep yourself, Sir Knight." Then the two charged with all their might, and after drew their swords, and smote each other with many strong strokes. Meanwhile Sir Gaunter rose up from where he lay, and said to his brother Sir Gilmere, "Come, let us help our brother Sir

Reynold, who holds his own right well with yonder knight." So they mounted their horses, and rode together at Sir Lancelot, who, seeing them come, smote Sir Reynold with a great stroke and tumbled him to the ground, and then, with two more blows, tumbled his brothers also. Then Sir Reynold started up, his head being all bloody, and came straight at Sir Lancelot. "Let be," said he; "I was not far, Sir Reynold, when you were made knight, and I should be loth to slay you." "I thank you for your goodness," said Sir Reynold, "and we will willingly yield us to you, for now we know you that are not Sir Kaye." "As for that," answered Sir Lancelot, "be it as it may. But do you yield yourselves to Guinevere the Queen on the next Whitsuntide, and say that Sir Kaye sent you." "That will we do," said the three brethren. Thereupon Sir Lancelot passed on, and the three helped each other in the caring for their wounds as best they might.

Sir Lancelot rode through the forest a great while till he saw a hound that seemed as if she tracked a hurt deer. He rode after the hound, and came upon a place where there was much blood, and still the hound quested, and Sir Lancelot ever followed, till he saw a manor, and a bridge thereto, over which the hound ran. And Sir Lancelot following, came into the hall of the manor, where there lay a dead knight, a very fair man to

see, and the hound licked his wounds. Thereat came a lady wringing her hands and lamenting, who said, "You have brought me overmuch sorrow, Sir Knight." "Nay, fair lady, say not so," Sir Lancelot made answer; "I never did harm to this knight, but this hound brought me hither, following the track of blood. Be not displeased with me, for I am aggrieved with your grievance." Then said the lady, "I trow that another than you slew my husband, and he is sore wounded, and is not like to live." "What was your husband's name?" said Sir Lancelot. "His name," said she, "was Sir Gilbert, one of the best knights in the world, but his name that slew him I know not." "God comfort you," said Sir Lancelot, and departed.

As he rode through the forest there met him a damsel that knew him well, who said, "You are well found, my lord; I beseech you by your knighthood that you help my brother, who is sore wounded. This day he fought with Sir Gilbert, and the blood from his wounds will not be stayed. Now there is a certain sorceress dwelling in a castle hard by, who says that my brother's wounds shall never be whole till a knight shall go into the Chapel Perilous, where he shall find a sword and a bloody cloth, the which things and none other shall make my brother whole, if they be put to his wounds." "'Tis a marvellous thing," saith

Sir Lancelot. "But tell me your brother's name."
"'Tis Sir Meliot de Logres," said she. "I am sorry for him," said Sir Lancelot, "for he is a fellow of the Round Table, and I will help him all that I can." "If you will," said the damsel, "follow this way, for it leads to the Chapel Perilous. I will abide here till you come again, which if you do, you will have accomplished more than any other knight upon earth."

So Sir Lancelot rode on, and when he came to the Chapel Perilous, he lighted from his horse, and tied the beast to a little gate. So soon as he was within the churchyard he saw on the front of the chapel many shields richly blazoned that were turned upside down; and not a few of them Sir Lancelot knew to have been borne by knights of his acquaintance. And when he looked again, he was aware of thirty great knights, that were taller by a yard than any man he had ever seen. These all grinned and gnashed their teeth upon Sir Lancelot, who was sore afraid of them. But he put his shield before him, and drew his sword, and made ready to do battle with them, for they were all in black harness, with their shields ready and their swords drawn. But when Sir Lancelot made for them, they parted before him and gave him the way; therewith he waxed bold, and entered the chapel, where was no light but one lamp burning dimly. Then he was aware of a

dead body covered with a silken cloth, and stooping down he cut off a piece of this cloth, whereat the earth quaked under him and he was afraid. Also he saw a sword lying by the side of the dead knight. This he took in his hand and so departed speedily out of the chapel. When he was in the yard, the thirty great knights in black cried out to him with a mighty voice, "Knight Lancelot, lay that sword from you, if you would not be the worse for it." Sir Lancelot made answer, "Ye get not this sword from me by fair words or by foul. Fight for it, if ye will." And he made for them, and passed through them as before. And beyond the chapel yard there met him a fair damsel, who said, "Sir Lancelot, leave that sword, if you would not die for it." But Lancelot answered only, "I will not leave it, condition me what you will." "'Tis well said," said the damsel, "for if you had left it, you had never seen again the lady that you love." "Then had I been a fool to leave the sword," said Sir Lancelot. Then said the damsel, "I pray you, gentle knight, that you kiss me once." "Nay," answered Sir Lancelot, "that will not I do." "Had you kissed me," said she, "your days had been ended; but now I have lost my labour. For know that I made this chapel to ensnare you, for if I might not have you for my husband alive, I would have had your body being dead,

which I would have embalmed and kissed it in despite of the lady that you love." "God keep me from all your subtle crafts," answered Sir Lancelot, and took his horse and departed. Thereupon the lady had such sorrow that she died within the space of fourteen days. She was a great sorceress.

Anon Sir Lancelot met the damsel that had sent him on his errand; and when she saw him she clapped her hands and wept for joy, and took him to a castle hard by where lay her brother, Sir Meliot. He was pale as with much bleeding, and when he saw Sir Lancelot he kneeled upon his knees and cried out, "O Sir Lancelot, help me!" Whereupon Sir Lancelot went to him and touched his wounds with the sword of the dead knight, and wiped them with a part of the bloody cloth in which the dead knight was wrapped. And he was straightway made as whole a man as ever he was. On the morrow Sir Lancelot departed, and Sir Meliot also, for he would be at the King's court at the Feast of Pentecost. Sir Lancelot rode a long way through many strange lands, and chanced to come to a castle, which as he passed, he thought that he heard two little bells ring. Then he was aware of a falcon that came flying over his head towards a high elm, and the falcon had long lines about her feet, and as she flew the lines caught in a bough that there

was, so that she hung by the legs in very sorry fashion, and Sir Lancelot was troubled to see her in this plight. Thereupon came a lady out of the castle hard by, and cried aloud, "O Lancelot, as you are the flower of all knights, help me to get my hawk that is lost, for if I get it not my husband will slay me, he is so hasty." "What is your lord's name?" said Sir Lancelot. "He is Sir Phelot," answered the lady, "a knight of the King of North Gales." Sir Lancelot said, "Fair lady, as you have charged me on my knighthood to help you in this matter, I will do what I may to get for you your hawk, but know that I am but a sorry climber, and the tree is passing high, and there are few boughs by which I may help myself." Thereupon he alighted, and unarmed him, and put off all his clothes but his shirt and breeches, and climbed up the tree to where the falcon was entangled, and tied the lines to a rotten branch that there was, which branch he broke off and cast to the ground. So the lady got her hawk. But anon there came a knight out of a grove hard by, clad in armour, with a naked sword in his hand, who cried, "Now I have found you, Sir Lancelot, as I would have you," and he stood by the tree to slay him when he should come down. Then cried Sir Lancelot, "O lady, why have you betrayed me?" "She has done as I bade her,"

said her husband, "and now you have no choice but you must die." "'Twere a shame," cried Sir Lancelot, "that an armed man should slay a naked knight." "You shall have no grace from me," answered Sir Phelot. "That will be your shame," said Lancelot. "But if you will have it so, take my armour, and hang my sword upon a bough that I may get it and so do battle with you." "Nay, nay," said Sir Phelot, "I know you too well; you get no weapon from me, if I can hinder it." Then said Sir Lancelot to himself, "Alas! that a knight should die without even a weapon!" And he looked about, and over his head he saw a bough that was shaped as a pike. This he broke off from the body of the tree, and clomb down, having it in his hand, till he came to where his horse was standing. Then he made a great leap to that side of the horse that was further from where stood Sir Phelot. Then the knight lashed at him very eagerly with his sword, thinking to slay him. But Sir Lancelot smote him on the head so sorely that he fell to the ground in a swoon. Whereupon Sir Lancelot took the sword from his hand and struck off his head. "Why hast thou slain my husband?" cried the lady. "The fault is not mine," cried Sir Lancelot; "ye plotted my death between you, and the evil is fallen upon your own heads." Then the lady swooned as if she

would die, and Sir Lancelot mounted his horse and departed, thanking God for his deliverance.

So he came to the King's court two days before the Feast of Pentecost, and at the feast came all the knights that had been delivered, and all likewise to whom he had granted grace, so that they should yield themselves to the Queen. And there was much mirth in the court. And Sir Kaye said, "Because Sir Lancelot took my harness and left me his I rode in peace, for no man would have to do with me."

CHAPTER XI

OF ANOTHER ADVENTURE OF SIR LANCELOT

QUEEN GUINEVERE made a dinner to the knights of the Round Table in London, to which she called Sir Gawaine and his brethren, and Sir Bors de Gains, and the brothers of Sir Lancelot and Sir Kaye, and a knight of Ireland that was named Sir Patrick, and many others. Now Sir Gawaine had a great liking for apples and pears and all manner of fruits, and whosoever had him to a feast would provide a good store of such things for him. Among the guests at this dinner was Sir Pinell, who had a great grudge against Sir Gawaine, because he and his brethren had slain by treachery his cousin, the good knight Sir Lamorack. Therefore, out of pure hatred, he poisoned certain apples of which Sir Gawaine was like to eat. But it fell out that the poisoned apples were eaten, not by Sir Gawaine, but by Sir Patrick of Ireland, who, when he had eaten, swelled up in a terrible fashion, and fell down

dead in the presence of the Queen. At this sight every knight leaped from his seat, enraged well-nigh out of his wits ; nor did any one know what he should say, for seeing that Queen Guinevere had made the dinner, there fell great suspicion upon her. And Sir Gawaine said, " My lady the Queen, this dinner was made for me, for all know that I have a great liking for fruit, and I perceive that I have but nearly escaped death." And Sir Mador de la Port said, " This shall not be ended so ; I have lost a full noble knight of my blood, and I will have vengeance for his death to the uttermost." And Sir Mador laid his complaint against the Queen that she had brought about the death of his cousin Sir Patrick. Then the Queen was so troubled that she wist not what to do, but fell a-weeping till she swooned. And when the King heard the matter, and how Sir Patrick had died miserably, he was very heavy of heart.

The King said to his lords, " I am greatly troubled in this matter, my lords, for because I must be a judge, therefore I may not do battle for my wife, whom I believe in my heart to be innocent. But I trust that some good knight will put his body in jeopardy for her sake, lest she should suffer death by burning"—for they that were guilty of poisoning were so punished—"in a wrong quarrel." " My lord " said Sir Mador,

“you are our king ; nevertheless you are bound by knighthood as we are. Therefore I pray you, as you love righteousness, that you give me a day.” Then King Arthur made answer, “ I give you a day fifteen days hence. Come ready armed on horseback in a meadow nigh to Westminster. If there be a knight to do battle for the Queen, then do your best, and may God speed the right. But if there be no knight found, then must the Queen be burnt with fire.” “ I am answered,” said Sir Mador.

When they were alone, King Arthur asked the Queen how this thing had come to pass. “ I know not,” said she. Then said he, “ Where is Sir Lancelot? Were he here, he would not grudge to do battle for you.” The Queen made answer, “ I know not where he is ; only his brethren and his kinsmen say that he is not within this realm.” “ For that I am right sorry,” said the King, for he would soon end this strife. But this being so, my counsel is that you go to Sir Bors, and entreat him to do battle for you. For I perceive that none other of the knights that were at your dinner will take up your cause.”

So the Queen departed, and sent for Sir Bors to her chamber. And when he was come she entreated him for succour. But he made answer, “ Madam, I may not meddle in this matter, lest the knights that were at the dinner should hold

me in suspicion. It is Sir Lancelot who should champion you in this, but you have driven him forth from the country. And now you come to me, who count it my chief honour that I have his friendship." Then the Queen said, "Fair knight, I put me wholly on your grace," and she kneeled down on both her knees, and besought him, saying, "Save me from this shameful death, for in this matter I have never offended."

While the Queen so knelt came in the King; and Sir Bors took her up, saying, "Madam, you do me dishonour, so kneeling." Then said the King, "Have mercy on my Queen, for I am sure that she is falsely accused. Promise therefore to do battle for her." "My lord," answered Sir Bors, "you ask of me a thing than which none could be greater. I shall anger much my fellows of the Round Table. Nevertheless I promise that I will fight for the Queen, unless there should first come a better champion than I."

Now Sir Bors knew well that Lancelot had not departed out of the realm, but that he was with a certain hermit that lived nigh to Windsor, a holy man, that had once been a knight, Sir Brastias by name. For indeed he had himself counselled him that he should rather hide himself than depart, which latter thing had been his first purpose when the Queen spake him ill. Now, therefore, Sir Bors departed on a day secretly to

Sir Brastias's hermitage, and told Sir Lancelot all that had happened. Said Lancelot, "This has fallen out as I most desired. Do you make yourself ready to do battle ; but tarry as long as you may, for Sir Mador is of a hot temper, and will chafe at your tarrying." "Sir," said Sir Bors, "let me deal with him ; it shall be as you desire."

When it was noised about that Sir Bors would do battle for the Queen, there were many that murmured at him, for indeed few of the Round Table but held that the Queen was guilty in the matter of Sir Patrick. But he made his defence to them, how that the King was the worthiest man in the world, and it were much to be pitied that he should be put to shame. Also he affirmed that the Queen was not guilty in this matter, for that she had never borne malice to Sir Patrick. But that there had been treason among some of the guests he could not deny. So some were well pleased with Sir Bors and others not so.

On the day appointed, the King and the Queen came to a meadow beside Westminster where the battle should be. Then the Queen was put into the Constable's ward, and an iron stake was set, and a great fire made about it, wherein she should be burnt, if Sir Mador should have the better in the fight ; for such was the custom in those days, neither was there shown any favour to a Queen

over a poor lady. Then came Sir Mador, and took his oath before the King, that he did in his heart believe the Queen to be guilty of this treason in the matter of Sir Patrick, and would prove it on his body on any that should say the contrary. After him came Sir Bors, and swore in like manner that he in his heart believed her to be innocent. "Make you ready," said Sir Mador, "and prove whether you or I be in the right." "You are a good knight," answered Sir Bors, "but I fear you not; only I have promised to King Arthur and the Queen that I will yield this championship if there come a better knight than I." So they departed each to his tent to make him ready. Anon came Sir Mador into the field, with his shield on his shoulder, and a spear in his hand, crying out to the King, "Bid your champion come forth, if he dare." Sir Bors was ashamed to tarry any longer, and rode to the end of the lists. But as he did so he was aware of a knight that came out of a wood hard by, armed at all points, with a white shield and arms that no one knew. This knight came to Sir Bors and said, "Sir, be not displeased if there is come one that has the better right than you to fight this battle. Meanwhile I thank you heartily for your good will."

Then Sir Bors rode to King Arthur and said, "There is come hither a knight that claims to do

battle for the Queen." The King asked who he was. "That I cannot show," answered Sir Bors, "but he made a covenant with me that he would be here this day."

Then the King called the strange knight and said to him, "Wilt thou fight for the Queen?" "That will I," answered he, "and for that am I come hither. But hinder me not, for I have many things to do, after I shall have fought this battle." Then he cried with a loud voice, "'Tis a shame to all you knights of the Round Table to see so noble a lady and courteous a Queen thus shamed among you." Greatly did they marvel who this strange knight might be, but no man knew, only Sir Bors.

Sir Mador cried to the King, "Let me know without further tarrying with whom I have to do." So the two rode to the lists' ends, and couched their spears, and ran against each other with all the might they had. Sir Mador's spear was broken to pieces, but the stranger's spear held and bare Sir Mador and his horse backward to the ground. But Sir Mador gat him lightly from under his horse, and put his shield before him, and drew his sword, and bade his adversary do battle with him on foot. So they came together with their swords, and gave each other many hard strokes, hurtling together like as though they had been two wild boars.

So they fought for nigh unto an hour, for Sir Mador was a right good knight and proved in many battles. But at last the stranger smote Sir Mador to the ground, and came near him to finish the battle. But he, rising suddenly, smote the stranger hardly on the thigh, so that the blood gushed out fiercely. Then the stranger, knowing himself to be wounded, and seeing also the blood flow, suffered his adversary to rise from the ground, and when he was risen gave him such a buffet as laid him flat, and this done, stood over him and would have taken off his helmet to slay him. But Sir Mador begged for his life, and yielded him, and released the Queen from his complaint. "I will not grant you life," said the stranger, "unless you freely release the Queen, and covenant that there shall be no mention made on Sir Patrick's tomb that she practised treason against him." "It shall be done," said he. Then the porters of the lists took up Sir Mador, and carried him to his tent, and the stranger went straight to the place where the King sat. Thither the Queen was also come by this time, and the King and she kissed each other right lovingly.

When the King saw the knight he thanked him heartily. So also did the Queen. And the King bade him rest him awhile, and take off his helmet, and drink a cup of wine. So he took off his helmet, and straightway all men knew that he

was Sir Lancelot. Then he spake aloud: "My lord, I am bound ever to be in your service, and in the service of my lady the Queen, for you made me a knight and she on that same day saved me from great dishonour, for I had lost my sword, which she kept and gave it to me when I needed it, so that I was not shamed among my fellow knights."

Then Sir Mador was dealt with by the physicians, and Sir Lancelot also was healed of his wounds.

Not many days afterwards came the Damsel of the Lake, the same that wedded King Pelleas, and by her enchantments disclosed the truth of the matter, how Sir Pinell had poisoned the apples, meaning to destroy Sir Gawaine. Then Sir Pinell fled to his own country, and the whole matter was written for all men to see on Sir Patrick's tomb.

CHAPTER XII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HOLY GRAIL

It fell out on the Feast of Pentecost in a certain year that when the King and his knights were come back from worshipping in the Minster they saw on the seats of the Round Table letters newly written in letters of gold, "Here ought to sit this one," and the name of a knight following, and on each seat a name. But on the Perilous Seat was written, "When four hundred winters and fifty and four shall be accomplished then shall this seat be filled." Then Sir Lancelot, making count of the years, cried out, "Then ought this seat to be filled this same day, for this is the Feast of Pentecost in the four hundred and fifty-fourth year. But I would counsel that these letters be not seen, till the knight that is to fill it be come." So, by consent, was made a cloth of silk to cover the seat. Then would the King have gone to his dinner. But Sir Kaye the Seneschal said, "If you go now to meat, you break the old custom of

the court, which is that you wait till you hear some adventure." While he spake there came in a squire, who said, "Sir, I bring to you marvellous tidings." "What be they?" said the King. "There is floating on the river, as I have seen with mine own eyes," said he, "a great stone, and in the stone is a sword sticking." Said the King, "I will see this marvel." So he went to the river, and all his knights went with him. And when they were come to the river, they saw the stone floating, and it was like to red marble, and in it was stuck a fair and rich sword on the handle of which was written in fine letters of gold, "No man shall draw me hence, but he only by whose side I ought to hang, and he shall be the best knight in the world." Said King Arthur, "Lancelot, this sword is surely yours; you are the best knight in the world." But Sir Lancelot answered soberly, "Nay, sire, this sword is not mine, nor dare I put my hand to it, for it is not by my side that it ought to hang. And I know full well that whoso shall seek to take it and fail therein, it shall so wound him that he shall not easily be made whole."

Then the King turned to Sir Gawaine, and said to him, "Fair nephew, I bid you for the love of me, make trial of that sword." Sir Gawaine said, "I will obey your bidding," and he took the sword by the handle, but could not move it. And

the King thanked him for his endeavour, but Sir Lancelot said, "Know that this sword shall so trouble you, that you will wish never to have set your hand thereto, no, not for the fairest castle in all the land." "Sir," Sir Gawaine made answer, "I could not disobey my uncle's commandment." The King was troubled to hear this ; nevertheless he bade Sir Percival try the sword. Then Sir Percival also set his hand to it, and drew at it strongly, but he could not move it at all. And when these three had failed, none others dared to put to their hands. "Now, sir," said Sir Kaye to the King, "you may go to your meat, for you have seen a marvellous adventure." So the King and his knights went to their meat, and all the seats were filled, save the Perilous Seat only.

While they thus sat at the meat, the squires serving them, there came to pass a marvellous thing. All the doors and windows of the palace shut themselves of their own accord, and yet the place was not darkened. Then spake the King, "Fair knights, we have already seen many marvels this day ; yet I doubt not that ere it be night we shall see yet greater." And even as he spake there came into the hall an old man very venerable, clothed all in white, but no man knew whence he came. The old man brought with him a young knight, clad in red armour, without shield or sword, but with a scabbard only hanging by his

side. The old man said to the King, "Sir, I bring you this young knight who is of the lineage of Joseph of Arimathea; he shall accomplish marvellous things." The King made answer, "You are heartily welcome, sir, and this young knight also." Then the old man bade the young knight doff his armour. And it was seen that he was clad in a coat of red satin, and a mantle furred with fine ermines on his shoulder. This done, the old man said to him, "Follow me," and so brought him to the Perilous Seat, whereby sat Sir Lancelot. Then the old man lifted up the cloth, and on the seat was written, "This is the seat of Sir Galahad, the good knight." The old man said, "Be assured that this place is yours." So the young knight sat him down in the seat with all boldness and said to the old man, "Sir, you may now go your way, for you have done right well that which was commanded you. Commend me to my grandsire, King Pelleas, and say that I shall come to see him so soon as may be." So the old man went his way, and there met him twenty noble squires who bare him company.

When the dinner was done, the King took Sir Galahad by the hand, and led him down to the place where the stone floated on the water, the Queen also, with many ladies, following. Said the King to Sir Galahad, "Here is as great a marvel

as ever I saw. Many knights have made trial of this sword to draw it from its place, but none have availed to do it." "Sir," answered Sir Galahad, "this is no marvel, for it is not their adventure but mine; so sure was I of this sword, that I brought none other with me, but only this scabbard that hangs by my side." So saying, he laid his hand upon the sword, and drew it full easily out of the stone, and thrust it into the scabbard. Then he said to the King, "This is the sword that belonged aforetime to Sir Balin, who was a passing good knight; therewith he slew his brother Sir Balan unawares, which thing was a grievous pity. This Balin also gave my grandfather, King Pelleas, a wound that has never been healed, no, nor shall be till I myself heal him."

After this the King, willing to try Sir Galahad, of what mettle he was, bade all his knights joust together in a meadow that was by Camelot. So they jousted, and none bare himself more bravely than did Sir Galahad. Many knights of the Round Table he overthrew. But there were two whom he overthrew not, and these two were Sir Lancelot and Sir Percival. When the jousting was ended, then Sir Galahad unlaced his helmet before the King and the Queen and all the court, and they saw that he was so like unto Sir Lancelot, that never two knights in all the world were more alike than these two.

After this all the company repaired to the Minster, and from the Minster they repaired to the hall and sat down to meat. And as they sat they heard a great crack as of thunder, so loud that it seemed as if the hall were riven in twain. And in the midst of this thundering there entered a sunbeam, seven times brighter than was ever the light of the sun. And every knight, as he looked on his fellow, saw him fairer than he had ever seen him before. So they sat and gazed, none daring to speak a word, till there came into the hall the Holy Grail, a fair vessel of gold, covered all about with white samite, in which was the Holy Body. But how it was borne none saw, nor did any behold the Vessel itself, for it was closely covered about, but the hall was filled with a most heavenly odour. Then the Holy Grail departed out of the hall, and as none knew whence it came, so neither did any know whither it went.

When it was gone, the knights had breath to speak. First the King gave thanks to God who had suffered them to see the Holy Vessel at this Feast of Pentecost. After him Sir Gawaine spake out : “ We have been this day beguiled so that, though the Holy Grail came among us, yet we saw it not, so covered was it. Now, therefore, I make this vow that to-morrow I will set out seeking the Holy Grail, and that in this seeking I will continue for a twelvemonth and a day,

and will not return till I have seen it more plainly than it has been seen to-day." And when the other knights of the Round Table heard Sir Gawaine so speak, they stood up, for the most part, and promised and vowed the same thing.

But the King was greatly troubled at this, and said to Sir Gawaine, knowing that it was he that stood up the first, and that the others took example by him, "You have well-nigh slain me by this vow and promise, for you have bereft me of the fairest fellowship of knights that ever was in this world. For I am sure that they who shall depart on this quest shall never more meet together in this world."

Now you shall hear how Sir Gawaine fared in the Quest. He rode many journeys forwards and backwards, seeking to join himself to Sir Galahad, and when he came to a certain abbey where Sir Galahad had been, he said to the monks, "If I may meet Sir Galahad, I will not lightly depart from him, for all his strange adventures." Then said one of the monks, "He will not be of your fellowship." "Why so?" said Sir Gawaine. "Because he is holy and you are sinful," said he. The next day he rode to a certain hermitage where he asked a shelter of the hermit, which the good man willingly granted to him, asking him who he was and whence he came. "I am of

King Arthur's court," said he, "and my name is Gawaine, and I seek the Holy Grail." "I know you," said the monk. Then Sir Gawaine told him how the monk at the abbey had called him a wicked knight. "He might well say it," said the hermit. "You might have followed virtuous living when you were made a knight, but you would do otherwise. But Sir Galahad has chosen the better part. Therefore you shall fail and he shall prosper. Yet 'twere something should you do penance for your sins." "What penance shall I do?" said Sir Gawaine. "What I shall set you," answered the hermit. "That may not be," said Gawaine, "we knights that seek adventure suffer pain enough." Then the hermit said, "God better you!" and held his peace.

Not many days after, Sir Gawaine met Sir Ector that was brother to Sir Lancelot. "I am weary of this quest," said he; and Sir Ector answered, "I have met twenty knights, and they were all in the same case." And riding on they came to a ruined chapel; and sitting down on the seats, fell asleep for weariness, and while they slept they dreamt, both of them, strange dreams. Afterwards they saw—for this was not a dream but a vision—a hand clothed in red samite, and in the hand was a candle burning very clear and these two passed into the chapel,

and so vanished out of their sight. And even as it vanished there came a voice to them saying, "Ye knights that are evil of life and poor of faith, the adventure of the Holy Grail is not for you."

When they had departed from the chapel, there met them a knight, who proffered to joust with them. "Now," said Sir Gawaine, "since I left Camelot, there has no one proffered to joust with me." "Let me joust," said Sir Ector. "Nay," answered Sir Gawaine, "not so, but if I be beaten you shall come after me." So the two jousted, and both fell to the ground. And when Sir Gawaine drew his sword, it was found that the other could not lift himself from the ground, for he was smitten through the body. "Now you must yield you," said Sir Gawaine. "I am but a dead man," answered the other, "but take me to a house of religion where I may receive the Holy Sacrament." "I know of none such," said Gawaine. But when the knight said that he would guide him, Gawaine set him on his horse, and sustained him till he came to the place. And when he had taken the Holy Sacrament, he prayed Sir Gawaine that he would draw the spear out of his body. "I am a knight," said he, "of the Round Table, and we are sworn brethren, and I was in search of the Holy Grail, even as you, and now you have slain me. May

God forgive you therefor." And when the spear was drawn out from his body he died. Then Sir Gawaine and Sir Ector buried him, weeping the while, and so departed.

All this time they saw not Sir Galahad, but at the last they met with him and in this wise. At a certain castle they saw a party of knights that would enter by the gate, and another party that hindered them. They joined themselves to the knights without, and these got by far the better. Meanwhile Sir Galahad joined himself to the knights within and did great deeds of arms. And he came by chance to Sir Gawaine and smote him so hard that he brake through the helm and smote him to the ground and also carved in two the shoulder of his horse. This done he stole away secretly. Then said Gawaine, "Now are the words of Lancelot come true that the sword in the stone would deal me such a buffet as I would not have for the best castle in the world. But now my quest is ended."

Thus did Sir Gawaine fare in his Quest of the Holy Grail.

Now I will tell of Sir Lancelot.

After many adventures of which there is no need to tell, as he slept on a certain night there came a voice to him saying, "Arise, Lancelot, and enter into the first ship that you shall find."

So he arose, and not long after came to a strand, and on the strand was a ship, into which he entered. In this he abode for a full month. And at the end of the month there came a knight riding. Him he saluted, saying, "You are welcome." And the knight saluted him again, saying, "My heart is much inclined to you," and asked his name. "My name," said he, "is Lancelot du Lake." "No wonder," said the other, "that I love you, for you are my father," "Are you Sir Galahad?" said he; and when he knew that 'twas he, there was great joy between them, and they lived long time together in the ship.

After this there came one who said, "Sir Galahad, you have been long time enough with your father; arise and go." Said Sir Galahad to his father, "I know that I shall not see you any more." And Sir Lancelot said, "Pray for me that God may keep me in His service." While they talked, there came a voice, saying, "Be careful to do well, for ye shall not see each other till the day of doom." Then Sir Galahad mounted his horse and rode away.

Then a wind arose and drove the ship in which Sir Lancelot was for a whole month. At the end of the month he came to a castle, with two lions keeping the door, and heard a voice that said, "Enter, Lancelot, and you shall have a part of

your desire." So he drew his sword for fear of the lions. But then came a dwarf that smote him on the arm so hard that the sword dropped out of his hand, and a voice said to him, "Man of little faith, why trust you in your harness more than in your Maker?"

Then he made a cross on his forehead and passed by the lions, which harmed him not. So he went through many doors that opened before him, till he came to a door that was fast shut. And he knew that the Holy Grail was within. Then he prayed that God would show him something of that which he sought. But when the door opened, and he would have entered, there came a voice, saying, "Enter not, Sir Lancelot; for it is not for you to do it." Then he looked, and saw a table of silver and the Holy Grail on it, with red samite over it, and many angels round about, of whom one held a candle, and others divers other things. Then he entered the chamber and came near to the silver table. Whereupon there smote him on the face a fiery breath, and he fell to the ground, having lost all power over his body, and his hearing also and his speech. So he lay, well-nigh as one dead. But he was aware of many hands about him, which took him, and bare him out of the chamber, and cast him down without the door. And on the morrow, when it was day, the people of the

place found him so lying, and wondered whether there was any life in him. And finding that there was life, they put him in a bed, where he lay without sense or speech for many days.

Thus did Sir Lancelot fare in the Quest.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW SIR GALAHAD FOUND THE HOLY GRAIL

AFTER Sir Galahad left the King's court, he came to a castle where was King Bagdemagus. Said he to the King, "What has brought you hither?" King Bagdemagus answered, "In this castle there is a shield which if any man essay to wear about his neck, except he be worthy of it, he will either die within three days, or get some sore mischief. Now I am minded to essay it; and if I fail, then you shall essay it, for I know that you will not fail." "You please me well," answered Sir Galahad, "for I have as yet no shield." On the morrow the King asked where this shield might be, and a monk showed it to him hanging behind the altar. It was white, with a red cross upon it. Then the King took it down from its place, and hung it about his neck, and so having put on his harness, went forth from the castle to seek adventures. But he took with him a squire, who should take news

to Sir Galahad of how it fared with him. When they had ridden two miles, they came to a valley where there was a hermitage, and they saw a knight coming to meet them that was clad in white armour. And he had his spear in rest, and came on as fast as might be. The King also put his spear in rest and rode against the knight and brake his spear on him. But the knight smote the King on the shoulder, where the shield covered him not, and bore him from his horse. Then he lighted down from his horse, and took the shield from him, saying, "This was great folly to bear a shield that may not be borne save by the best knight in the world." And to the squire he said, "Bear this shield to Sir Galahad, and greet him well from me." The squire said, "Tell me your name." "Take no heed of my name," said the knight, "for it is not for you to know. But be sure that this shield is for no man but Sir Galahad." Then they carried the King to an abbey, where he was healed of his wound. But he scarce escaped with his life.

After this Sir Galahad rode away carrying the shield, and came to the hermitage. There the knight in white armour met him, and the two greeted each other right courteously, and when Sir Galahad would know the story of the shield, he told it to him, that it was borne in old time

by a certain King Evelake against the Saracens, having been given to him by Joseph of Arimathea, and that when Joseph lay dying, he made a cross upon the shield with his blood, and that after this the shield was put away till the best knight in the world should come for it. After this the white knight vanished out of Sir Galahad's sight.

Then Sir Galahad, being now fully armed—for hitherto he had lacked a shield—rode on his way, and had many adventures. One while he met Sir Lancelot and Sir Percivale, that were the two strongest knights in the world, save, maybe, Sir Tristram of Lyonesse. And first he smote Sir Lancelot and his horse down to the ground, and afterward he served Sir Percivale in the same fashion, and this latter he had slain but that, by good chance, the sword swerved somewhat. But they knew not who he was till a recluse, that dwelt in a hermitage hard by, cried aloud, "Hail, now, the best knight in the world." This the two hearing, knew that it was Sir Galahad, and would fain have joined themselves to him, but he rode away as fast as he could.

Then he met with Sir Gawaine, and dealt him a very sore blow, and how he dwelt for awhile with Sir Lancelot his father has been told already. Many other adventures he had, till

there remained but one thing for him to do before the finding of the Grail, which thing was the healing of King Pelleas from the dolorous stroke which Sir Balin had dealt him, as has been told before.

When he came to the castle where King Pelleas dwelt, he and Sir Percivale and Sir Bors, for it was granted to them to be with him, they saw a man attired like to a bishop, with four angels about him. The angels set him in a chair before the table of silver whereon was the Holy Grail; then came in other angels, that bore candles of wax, and a towel, and a spear that dropped drops of blood in a marvellous fashion. And the man that was attired as a bishop said to the knights, "This is the Holy Grail. Ye see it now, and shall see it yet more plainly in the place whither ye shall next go." Then he gave them his blessing, and so vanished out of their sight.

Then went Sir Galahad to the spear, and touched the blood, and having touched it he anointed the King, who was straightway healed of his wound.

After this these three entered into a ship which carried them to a certain city of heathen folk, whose King put them in prison. But at the end of the year the king, having fallen sick, sent for them, and cried for mercy on what he had done. So they forgave him.

When he was dead the people of that city would not be content but they must have Sir Galahad to their king. And being King, he made for the table of silver a chest of gold to be a covering of the Holy Grail, and every day he and his companions said their prayers before it. At the year's end it was granted to Sir Galahad to see the Holy Grail full plainly, as no man ever saw it but he. When he had seen it, he went to Sir Percivale and kissed him, and also to Sir Bors and kissed him, and commended them both to God. This done, he bade them salute Sir Lancelot, and tell him, said he, "that he remember how unstable is the world." Having said this he died, and the angels carried his soul to heaven. And then came down a hand that took the Holy Grail and the spear, and carried them away.

Thus did Sir Galahad accomplish the adventure of the Holy Grail, because he was pure and without spot.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEATH OF ARTHUR

THERE fell out, for causes which need not be here rehearsed, a great strife between King Arthur and Sir Lancelot. And Sir Lancelot withdrew to the land of France where he was born, and thither the King followed him with a great host, and made war upon him. Many battles were fought, with much damage to both hosts, but neither could get clearly the better.

SIR Mordred, who had been made ruler of all England by his uncle the King, so long as he should himself be absent, caused letters to be made as though they came from over the sea, in which it was written that the King had been slain in battle with Sir Lancelot. These letters having been read, Sir Mordred called a parliament, and constrained the lords to choose him king ; having been so chosen, he was crowned at

Canterbury, in which city he held a feast for fifteen days. But as he sat at the feast there came to him tidings that the King had ended his war with Sir Lancelot, and was coming back with all his host, that he might be avenged on the false traitor that had sought to spoil him of his kingdom. Then Sir Mordred gathered together an army, and many came to him, thinking that the realm would be better ordered under him than King Arthur had ordered it, and not a few to whom the King had given lands and riches were found taking part against him.

Sir Mordred came, with the army that he had gathered, to Dover, whither King Arthur sailed bringing his host with him in many ships and galleys. And Sir Mordred would have hindered the King's landing. Then there was a great battle fought upon the shore, and many brave men were slain on either part, but the King and his knights fought so fiercely that they could not be hindered from landing. So Sir Mordred and his host were driven back.

When the King came to reckon up them that were slain or wounded, they found Sir Gawaine lying in a boat more than half dead. The King was right sorry to see him in such evil case, and said to him, "O my nephew, you are the man whom I most loved on earth, and now I am like

to lose you, and Sir Lancelot also I have lost, so now there is no joy left to me in life." Sir Gawaine made answer, "My death-day is come, and that through my own hastiness and wilfulness. I am smitten on the old wound which Sir Lancelot gave me, and I know well that I shall die thereof. Now if Sir Lancelot had been with you, this war had not been, and of this war I am myself a chief causer, for I have been an enemy to Sir Lancelot and his kin. But now get me paper and ink and pen, that I may write to Sir Lancelot before I die."

So the King gat him what he wanted, and Sir Gawaine wrote a letter to Sir Lancelot to this purpose, that he should come with all his host to the help of the King, and make no delay, for that the false traitor, Sir Mordred, had usurped his kingdom. The ending of the letter was this: "I write this but two hours and a half before my death with my own hand and in my own heart's blood; and I charge you, as you are the most famous knight in all the world, to come and see my tomb."

At noon that day Sir Gawaine died, and the King caused him to be buried in the chapel at Dover. This being done, it was told him that Sir Mordred had pitched his camp on Barren Heath, and he led his host thither, and there was a great battle between the two hosts, in which

Sir Mordred's men were beaten, so that he was constrained to flee to Canterbury.

It was agreed that there should be a battle on the Monday after Trinity Sunday, on a down near to the city of Salisbury. Sir Mordred raised much people chiefly from London, and from that part of England which lies to the East, and for the most they that were of Sir Lancelot's part stood by him. On the night before the battle the King had a dream, in which he seemed to see Sir Gawaine, with whom was a great company of ladies. The King said to him, "Welcome, my nephew; I thought you to be dead, but now I see you alive. Thanks be to God therefor! But who are these ladies with you?" "Sir," answered Sir Gawaine, "these are they for whom I did battle when I was alive in a righteous quarrel, and through their prayers I am come hither, having had leave to warn you of your death, for, of a surety, if you fight to-morrow, as has been agreed, you will be slain, and with you a great multitude of people of both parts. Now, therefore, I am suffered to give you this counsel, that you make a truce with Sir Mordred for a month's space, because within a month Sir Lancelot will come, bringing with him a great company of knights, who shall help you in such fashion as to put Sir Mordred and his host utterly to confusion." When he had said

this, Sir Gawaine vanished away, and the ladies with him, and King Arthur awoke from his sleep.

When it was day the King sent for his lords and counsellors, and told them of this dream. And it was agreed that there should go to Sir Mordred two lords and two bishops, and make with him a truce for a month.

The next day King Arthur and Sir Mordred met in a space between the two armies, each having with him fourteen persons. Now the King had warned his people, saying, "If you see a sword drawn, come on fiercely, and slay Sir Mordred, for I well know that he is a traitor." Mordred also gave a like charge to his people, for he said to himself, "I know that the King will in no wise forgive me."

So the King and Sir Mordred met in the space between the hosts, and held conference, and came to an agreement. And when the conference was ended, they sat down to drink wine. But as they sat, there came out an adder, and stung a knight. When the knight knew that he was stung he drew his sword to slay the adder, not thinking any harm. But when the two hosts saw the sword drawn, they made them ready for battle.

Never in all the world was there a more grievous battle than was fought that day. Bravely did the King bear himself, and bravely also Sir

Mordred, for all that he was a traitor, for he came of a noble stock. So they fought all this day, till it was now near to the setting of the sun, and of the King's host there were left only the King himself, and Sir Bedivere and the King's butler, Sir Lucan, that was Sir Bedivere's brother ; but of Sir Mordred's host there was left alive Sir Mordred only.

When the King looked about him, he said : "Where are all my noble knights? Alas! that I should have lived to see a day so doleful! Now am I come to my end, but I would fain see that traitor, Sir Mordred, for it is he that has caused all this mischief." Then he was aware of Sir Mordred where he stood alone, leaning on his sword, among a great heap of dead. "Now give me my spear," cried the King, "that I may slay this traitor." "Let him be," said Sir Lucan, "this day. Remember what was told you last night in a dream by Sir Gawaine, and how you have won the field, for there are three of us alive, and of Sir Mordred's host one only." "Nay," said the King, "be it for life or death ; he shall not escape my hands, nor could I have him at better advantage." "God speed you well," said Sir Bedivere.

Then the King took his spear in his hands and ran towards Sir Mordred, crying out to him, "Now, traitor, is your death-day come." And when

Sir Mordred heard this, he ran at the King with his sword drawn. The King smote Sir Mordred under his shield, so that the spear was driven right through his body. And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death-wound, he smote the King with all his might upon the head, and the sword brake through the helmet, and wounded the brain-pan. And straightway Sir Mordred fell stark dead upon the earth, and the King sank down in a swoon. Then did the two knights Lucan and Bedivere carry him to a little chapel that was hard by the sea.

As he lay there, there came a cry from the field of battle. When the King heard it, he said, "What means this cry?" So Sir Lucan went to see for all that he was grievously hurt, and found that the cry came from those that spoiled the dead, aye and did to death them that were wounded. For the thieves shouted and strove over their plunder, and the wounded cried for agony. Then Sir Lucan came again, and told what he had seen, and said, "It were well, sir, if we could take you to some town." "I think it," said the King, "but I may not stand, such pain have I." Then the two knights took him up, and in the lifting the king swooned. And Sir Lucan's heart burst, for the strain that he had, and he fell dead. When the King came to himself, he saw Sir Lucan lie and cried, "Alas!

this is a heavy sight, to see this noble knight lie dead in this fashion. He would not complain, so set was he in his heart to help me." And Sir Bedivere also wept for his brother. But in a short space, said the King: "Leave this weeping, for it will not avail aught. Were I to live, I should not cease to mourn for this good knight, Sir Lucan; but my time draws nigh. Now, therefore, take my sword Excalibur, and throw it into the water, and come again and tell me what you shall see." "I will do so," said Sir Bedivere, "and bring you word again." So he departed, and as he went he saw how the pommel and the haft of the sword were all of precious stones. And he said to himself, "If I throw this rich sword into the water, there shall come no good, but only harm and loss." So he laid the sword under a tree, and came again to the King. "What saw you?" said the King. "Nothing," said he, "but waves and wind." "That is untruly said," answered the King; "now go again, as you are dear to me, and spare not to throw the sword into the water." Then Sir Bedivere went again, but he thought it sin and shame to cast away so noble a sword. Therefore he hid it again, and went back to the King. "What saw you?" said he. "Nothing," answered Sir Bedivere, "but the waves lapping on the shore." Then the King cried: "You have been false these two

times, though I thought you a noble knight, for you would betray me for the sake of a rich sword. But now go straightway ; you have put me in great peril of my life, for I have taken cold. Go again, and throw the sword, and if not, I will arise and slay you with my own hands." Then Sir Bedivere went again and took the sword, and threw it into the water as far as he could ; and there came a hand out of the water, and shook it thrice, and so vanished away.

Then Sir Bedivere came again to the King, and told him what he had seen. "Now help me hence," said he, "for I fear that I have tarried over long." Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back, and carried him to the water-side, where there was a barge with many fair ladies in it, who also had black hoods, and they wept and wailed when they saw the King.

"Now put me into this barge," said the King. So Bedivere put him, and the King laid his head in the lap of one of the Queens, who said, "You have tarried over long, my brother." Then they rowed from the land. And Sir Bedivere cried, "My lord Arthur, what will become of me, being left alone among mine enemies?" The King answered, "In me there is no help. I go to the vale of Avalon, where I may haply be healed of my grievous wound. But if you see me no more,

pray for me." Then Sir Bedivere lost the sight of the barge.

Now what befell the King after this no man knows. Only 'tis said there was written upon his tomb these verses—

"Here lies King Arthur, who of old did reign
In British land, and shall be King again."

Of Sir Bedivere, it is written that he became a hermit. Sir Lancelot also repented of his sins, and lived a holy life ; and other knights, among whom were Sir Bors, and Sir Ector, and Sir Galahatine went to the Holy Land, and there did many battles with Turks and Infidels, and died all of them on a certain Good Friday, in God's service.

*THE TREASURE OF THE
NIBELUNGS.*

CHAPTER I

KRIEMHILD

THIS is a story of noble heroes, and of the great deeds which they wrought ; a story of lamentation and weeping ; a story of feasting and gladness.

In the land called the Rhineland there grew to woman's estate a maid that was very fair to look upon, fairer than all that were in the whole country-side, and Kriemhild was her name. Beauty she had, and all things else that can fall to a woman's lot, nor was there any man that was not constrained to love her. Three brothers she had, kings all of them, wealthy, and of noble birth. Their ward she was, and they were watched over with all care and love. Her father was King Dankrat, who had been a mighty man of valour from his youth. Now he was dead, but Queen Uté, the maiden's mother, was yet alive. And on the Queen and the Kings her sons there waited many brave knights ; foremost

among them was Hagen of Tronjé, and next to him was Sir Dankwart the Marshal, whom men called Swiftfoot; Ortwein also, his sister's son, who was High Server, and Sir Sindold the Cup-bearer, and Sir Hunold the Chamberlain.

Now it came to pass that Kriemhild dreamed a dream, and she told it to her mother: "O my mother," she said, "I dreamed that I had reared a falcon; very strong he was and fair, and in my dream I saw two eagles tear him. It was the greatest grief that ever I had in my life."

Queen Uté, her mother, said: "This is the interpretation of thy dream, my daughter. This falcon of thy rearing is the man whom you shall have to your husband. May God keep him from harm!"

Said Kriemhild: "What do you say of husbands, dear mother? Never shall I desire any man's wooing, for well I know that beneath love there ever lurks sorrow."

"Nay, my daughter," the Queen made answer. "Speak not lightly of love. If ever joy is to come into your life, as all women desire, it must needs come of man's love. Fain would I see you a fair bride, and a good knight at thy right hand."

But Kriemhild said: "Counsel me not such counsel, my mother. Such joy is paid for with bitter sorrow. Have I not seen it? As for me, I will have neither the one nor the other."

So she spake, and so she did, keeping love ever far from her, and living joyously in all freedom. Yet, for all this, it was her fate to be wedded. But how it fared with her husband, whether he was torn as was the falcon that she saw in her dream, and who were the eagles, you shall hear told in this story.

CHAPTER II

SIEGFRIED

Now there dwelt in a castle in the Netherland a certain King, Siegmund by name, who had to wife a fair lady Sieglind. These two had a son whom they called Siegfried, a very gallant prince. Very carefully did they train and teach him, as befitted his birth; but the root of the matter was in the lad himself, for he had an honest and good heart, and was in all things a very perfect knight. This Siegfried being by this time come to man's estate, and being well practised in arms, and having also as much of wealth as he needed, turned his thoughts to marriage, desiring to win a fair bride for himself; nor indeed would the fairest of women have thought scorn to stand at Siegfried's side.

But first King Siegmund would call up his liegemen, and many guests also from the countries round about, to a great banquet in his castle hall. There came many knights, and if there were any

who lacked a knight's fee, but was fitted for the estate by birth and breeding, these King Siegmund bade to the feast and the tournament, and in due time girt each of them with a knight's sword. There were four hundred squires on whom the King bestowed this honour that day, and the first of the four hundred was Siegfried. And after the giving of the swords a solemn mass was sung, and the four hundred were consecrated to their work with such rites and ceremonies as were meet; and after the mass the tournament began. For each of the four hundred there stood a charger ready saddled that he might mount. So they mounted, and made ready to tilt in the lists. A fine sight it was to behold the knights meet in full encounter, to hear the crash of the lances when they broke, and to see the splinters flying against the castle wall. In due time the King commanded that the tilting should cease, for many a sturdy shield lay broken on the ground, and all about upon the grass lay jewels in plenty which had fallen from the clasps of the shields, so fierce had been the onset of the knights. Then, the tourney being ended, there was held a great feast in the hall, and no man remembered his weariness any more, such store was there of food, and wine without stint; all had enough, whether he was native born or a stranger. And after the feast were games and pastimes, and to

those that contended therein the good King Siegmund gave gifts many and costly; also the Queen, Sieglind the Fair, gave freely the red gold out of her store. None went away empty, I trow, that had been bidden to the feast.

Now in these doings many bare themselves right gallantly, but there was no man that could be matched with Prince Siegfried. Now some there were that said, "'Twere well if this young Prince were presently King of the land!" So they spake one to another. But Siegfried thought not to reign, his father and mother being yet alive. If he could keep back the enemies that thought to do harm to the land, that was enough for him, and he desired no more.

CHAPTER III

SIEGFRIED COMES TO WORMS

IT came to Prince Siegfried's ears that there was a very fair maiden in the Rhineland, and that many noble knights had come from far and wide to make their suit to her, but that she would have none of them. Never yet had she seen the man whom she would take for her lord. All this the Prince heard, and he said to his companion : " This Kriemhild will I have for my wife ; should the Kaiser himself wish to wed, she, both for beauty and birth, would be a fitting bride for him." But King Siegmund, when he heard of his son's purpose, was not a little troubled thereat ; and Queen Sieglind wept, for she knew King Gunther well, and she was aware of the strength and valour of his warriors. So they said to the Prince, " Son, this is not a wise wooing." But Siegfried made answer, " My father, I will have none of wedlock, if I may not marry where I love." Thereupon the King said : " If thou

canst not forego this maiden, then my will shall be as thy will, and thou shalt have all the help that I can give. Nevertheless, I know what a stout-hearted company of warriors this Gunther has about him. Were there Hagen only and none beside, 'twould be enough. For all his courteous seeming, he would fain do us all the mischief that he could, if we go to woo this fair maid." "Nay," said Siegfried, "he shall not hinder me for all his pride. In kindness will I ask him for the boon, and if he deny me then will I wrest it from him by force."

King Siegmund made answer to his son: "I do greatly mislike your speech. Verily, if any report thereof should be carried to the Rhineland, you may never ride thither. Well I know King Gunther and his brothers; and no man may hope to win the fair maid, their sister, by force. Yet, if you are bent on this thing, I will call all friends that are left to me, and they shall ride with you."

"Not so," said Siegfried; "when I travel to the Rhineland, I will take no warriors with me. Far be it from me to take the maid by force, or to owe the winning of her to another man's hand. Twelve comrades will I take with me, my father, and twelve only. Do you of your kindness, my father, equip them for their journey."

But Queen Sieglind the Fair heard of the

matter, and wept sore, fearing lest one of King Gunther's men should slay her son. But he said, comforting her : " Trouble not yourself at my purpose, fair mother ; there is no foeman upon earth that I fear. But rather give me help for my journey, that I and my comrades may be bravely furnished."

Queen Sieglind said : " If you are still minded to go, then I will prepare for you and your companions the best raiment that ever warrior wore."

Siegfried bowed low to his mother, saying : " So be it ; only remember that twelve comrades only will I take with me."

So the Queen and her ladies sat stitching night and day, taking no rest till the raiment was ready. King Siegmund the while commanded that they should polish their war-gear, coats of mail, and helmets, and shields.

So all things being ready, they craved leave from the King and Queen that they might depart. Not without tears did they grant it, fearing lest their son should be slain. " Nay," said he, " weep not, dear parents, nor fear that I shall come into any peril."

So they departed, and on the seventh day they rode into the town of Worms in Rhineland, a gallant company, bravely arrayed, for their garments flashed with gold, and their war-gear, over their coats of mail and their helmets, were

newly polished. Their long swords hung down by their sides, even to their spurs, and sharp were the javelins which they held in their hands. The javelin of Siegfried was two spans broad in the blade, and had a double edge. Terrible were the wounds that it made. Their bridles were gilded, and their horse-girths of silk. A comely sight they were to see, and the people came from all round to gaze upon them.

When they came to the hall, certain knights and squires came out to greet them, and would have taken their armour from them and led their horses to their stables, as hosts are wont to do for their guests. But Siegfried said: "Let be; suffer the horses to remain, for I have it in my mind to ride further presently. But tell me first where I may find King Gunther."

One of the knights made answer: "If you would find King Gunther, that is easily done. Go to yonder hall; there will you see him standing among his lords, and gallant warriors they are."

Now by this time tidings had been brought to the King that certain warriors were come, very gallant to look upon and richly clad, but that no one knew who they were, and whence they came. "Now," said the King, "this troubles me much that no one can tell whence these warriors come." To him Ortwein, the High Server, made answer,

"Seeing, sire, that no man knows aught about these strangers, let some one fetch Hagen, my uncle; he knows all the kingdoms of the world, and the dwellers therein."

So they fetched Hagen. "What want you, my lord King?" said he. Said the King, "There are come even now certain strangers, and no man knows whence they be. Now if you can tell me aught, say on."

So Hagen went to the window and looked at the men. Well pleased was he with their clothing and their gear of war; but he had never seen their like in the Rhineland. So he said: "Whencesoever these men have come, my lord, that they are princes or of a prince's company is clear, so nobly clad are they, and so good their horses. But stay; Siegfried, the famous hero, I have never seen with my eyes, but I verily believe that he is standing there. Verily, if it indeed be he, he has brought a new thing into this land, for there is no warrior that is his match for strength and for valour. Hear now the story of the brave deeds which he did.

"Once upon a time riding alone, with none to help him, he came upon the treasure of the Nibelungs. It had been newly taken out of the hollow of a mountain, and the Nibelungs were making ready to share it. And when they saw him, one cried aloud, 'Here comes Siegfried, the

great champion from the Netherland!’ So the two princes of the Nibelungs bade him welcome, and would have him divide the treasure among them. A mighty store it was; of jewels such plenty that scarce five-score waggons could carry them away, and of red gold yet more. All this they would have Siegfried divide among them. And for his wages they gave him the Nibelungs’ sword. But little did they know what should befall them at his hand. For lo! ere he had ended his dividing, they stirred up strife against him. Twelve stout comrades had the princes, very giants, and with these the princes thought to have slain Siegfried. But they availed nought; with the very sword which they had given him for his reward—Balmung was its name—he slew them all. The giants he slew, and the kings also, and when Albrich the dwarf would have avenged his lords—for he was the keeper of the treasure—Siegfried overcame him also, and wrested from him the Hood of Darkness, which whoso dons, straightway he vanishes from the sight of all men.

“But the treasure he would not take for himself. ‘Carry it back,’ said he to Albrich the dwarf, ‘to the hole whence it was taken, and keep it for me. And you shall swear a great oath to do me any service that I shall ask of you, whensoever and wheresoever may seem good to me.’

"Another story have I heard tell of Siegfried, how he slew a dragon with his own hand and sword, and how he bathed him in the dragon's blood, and made his skin so hard and horny that no sword may pierce it. Let us therefore receive him with all courtesy; for verily he is a right strong and valiant knight, and 'tis better, I ween, to be his friend than his enemy."

"Methinks thou art right," said King Gunther. "Let us go down and greet him courteously."

So the King and his nobles went down. And the King said: "What means this, noble Siegfried? Why art thou come from the Netherland to the Rhineland?"

"'Twas told me," Siegfried made answer, "in my own country, that there was never a King that was braver or bolder than you, nor one that had warriors about him so valorous and strong. Now I myself am born to kingship; but I shall never be content till I shall have proved myself worthy to reign. Come, therefore, let us wrestle together, and if I prevail, then shall thy lands and castle be mine."

Much did the King marvel at this speech, and wroth were his nobles. "Now this is strange talk," said he, "that the kingdom which my father had before me should be wrested from me by force!"

"Nay," answered Siegfried, "'tis but just. It

you prevail, my realm is yours; and if I, then your people shall serve me."

Out spake Ortwein, lord of Metz, that was High Server to Gunther the King: "These brag-gart words vex me much, my lord King. Verily if thou and thy two brethren were here with none to help you, and this fellow brought against you the whole army of a prince, yet would I over-master him and make him speak milder words."

Great was the anger of Siegfried at these words. "What!" he cried, "wilt thou measure thyself against me who am a King's son, and thou but a simple knight? Twelve such as thou art could not stand against me."

"Bring me my sword," cried the lord of Metz.

But King Gernot was for peace. "Nay," said he, "Siegfried has done us no harm, and 'twere better, I trow, to win him for our friend."

But the stout warrior Hagen broke in, "No harm! my lord Gernot. Do we not well to be angry when this man comes from the Netherland to flout us in this fashion?"

"If my speech offend you, Sir Hagen," said Siegfried, "then wait and see what I shall do with my arms."

But Gernot turned to his nobles and bade them hold their peace. And Siegfried bethought him of the fair Kriemhild, doubting whether he would thus win her favour. Nevertheless, for his heart

was hot within him, he said, "Why does Hagen linger? and Ortwein, where is he?"

But King Gernot's command to his knights was still "Answer him not." And to Siegfried he said, "Come now, Sir Prince, you and your comrades are welcome here," and he bade the pages bring goblets of wine. "All that we have is yours, and gladly will we share it with you, be it wealth or blood."

So was Siegfried wrought to a milder mood.

Then he and his warriors doffed their war-gear; and the men of the Rhineland treated them right royally, giving them of the very best. Never were guests more honoured as, of a surety, never guests had bolder mien. And as the days went by the Kings and their guests gave themselves to sport and pastime; but whatever they did, Siegfried was ever the first; none could put the stone so far, or cast the spear with so sure an aim. Sometimes the fair ladies of the court looked on, and not a few looked on the young prince from the Netherland with favour. But he had ever one only in his heart, ever the fair Kriemhild.

And what shall we say of Kriemhild herself? So soon as the knights began their sports in the courtyard, straightway she ran to the window and looked. For naught else did she care, so long as this was to be seen. Many a time did

he think to himself: "Shall I ever see this fair one with my eyes?" For a whole year he abode with Gunther and his brothers, but from the beginning to the end thereof Kriemhild he never saw.

CHAPTER IV

OF SIEGFRIED AND THE SAXONS

WHEN the year was ended, two heralds came to the Rhineland bearing a strange message, from two Kings; that is to say, from Ludeger the Saxon, and Ludegast, who was King of the Danes. The heralds were brought into the presence of King Gunther. Right courteously did the King greet them, and asked them of their errand. "Ye are welcome," he said, "though in sooth I know not whence ye come. But tell me your errand."

The heralds, fearing not a little the King's answer, said, "With thy good will, O King, we will open the whole matter. The Kings our masters, to wit Ludeger the Saxon, and Ludegast the Dane, have sent us to say that they purpose to invade Rhineland. Ye have done them wrong. Therefore they are coming to Worms upon the Rhine and bringing a great army with

them. In four-score days and four they will be here. Therefore if ye have good friends to help you, call them, and make ready to fight for your lands and castles ; for, of a surety, ye will need them. Nevertheless, if ye would rather have peace, say what ye will give to our masters."

This message greatly troubled King Gunther. "Fetch Hagen," he said, "and also King Gernot my brother." When they were come, he opened the matter to them. "Let them come," said Gernot ; "they will find us ready." "Aye," said Hagen, "but the time is short. Tell it to Siegfried."

On the morrow Siegfried saw that his hosts were sad. "What has changed your mirth?" said he. So King Gunther told the thing. Then said Siegfried, "Sir, let not this matter trouble you. Give me a thousand warriors, for of my own following I have but twelve, and let Hagen and Ortwein and the other chiefs help me, and I will order this matter for you." So the King gave this answer to the messengers : "My foes had best tarry at home ; if they will come hither they shall learn to their cost how we defend our land." And he sent them away with many gifts. "Let us follow them," said Siegfried. So, as soon as the thousand warriors could be mustered, they set out for the land of the Saxons. And when they were come to the borders, said Siegfried to

the chiefs of the Rhinelanders, "Abide here awhile with your men, and I will ride on alone." So he rode on alone till he came in sight of the host of the enemy. Forty thousand warriors lay in camp, Saxons and Danes, of each twenty thousand. Now before the camp there was a knight keeping watch. This was Ludegast, King of the Danes. So soon as the two were aware of each other, they laid their spears in rest, and spurred their horses to the charge. At the first meeting neither had the advantage. Then they let fall their spears, and took to their swords, giving and receiving many mighty blows. Meanwhile thirty knights that followed King Ludegast had seen the combat, and hastened to their master's help. But ere they could reach him, Siegfried had won the day. Thrice he smote the King's breastplate, and thrice the blade pierced it through, so that the blood gushed out in a great stream, and the King fell to the ground. Then he yielded himself and his lands to the conqueror. By this time the thirty were come to the place ; but little did they avail, for Siegfried smote them till but one only was left alive. Him he spared that he might carry back the tale to his own people ; but the King he took with him to the chiefs of the Rhineland where they tarried for him at the border. "We have made a good beginning," said he, and showed them the King. "But

up, for there is more to be done ; many a Saxon wife, I trow, will rue the day when we came hither." So the thousand sprang all of them to horse, and rode into the land of the Saxons, and Volker the bold minstrel was ever in the van.

In a short space they came to where the Saxon camp was set, and a fierce battle began. The Rhineland chiefs bare themselves full bravely that day, and smote down many a Saxon warrior, but none could compare with Siegfried and his Netherlanders. Thrice did the hero pierce the Saxon line, and thrice did he make his way back to his own people, dealing death from the rear-guard to the van.

But when Ludeger, King of the Saxons, saw him, then he knew who it was that had overthrown and taken his brother King—for some had told him that King Gernot had done the deed—for he espied a crown on the buckler that Siegfried carried on his arm. Then he cried to his men, "Enough of fighting ; here is the son of King Siegmund come against us. Lower your banners and let us ask for peace." So King Ludeger asked for peace, and it was granted him at his seeking. Only he must go as a prisoner to the Rhineland.

After this Siegfried and his allies set out homeward. But certain lords that were swift of foot

ran before to take the news. Great joy did these messengers bring with them, and to none greater than to the Lady Kriemhild. She bade her maidens bring one of them to a chamber apart, and when he was come thither she said to him, "Tell me now, how sped my friends? how fared King Gernot, my brother? who bare himself most bravely of all our champions?" The youth made answer, "Lady, we had no coward in all our company. And nobly did the men of the Rhineland bear themselves in the field. But there was no one to compare with Prince Siegfried the Netherlander. Ortwein of Metz, and Hagen, and many another did valiantly, but Siegfried excelled them all. 'Twas he, and he only, that took captive the two Kings, for know, fair lady, that the Danish King and the Saxon also are prisoners, both of them." Kriemhild grew rosy red to hear how nobly Siegfried had borne himself, and she said to the messenger, "You have told a goodly tale, and shall have a goodly reward, and a garment of price and ten marks of red gold." Gladly, I trow, are glad news told to wealthy ladies.

Then Kriemhild and her ladies hastened to the windows that they might see the warriors returning home, and King Gunther himself rode forth to meet them. A hearty welcome did he give them, and he made provision for the wounded whether of friend or foe, for he was a kind and courteous

King. To King Ludegast he said, "Welcome, King Ludegast. I have suffered much at your hands, fearing, not without cause, what you and your people might do to me. But my warriors have done nobly for me. God requite them therefor!" "Ay! King Gunther! you do well to thank them. Never has King been better served by his warriors than have you. But do you, I pray, deal courteously with me, as King should deal with King!" "You shall have your wish," answered King Gunther; "only I would have you tarry with me, till peace be made." To this King Ludegast gave a willing consent.

And now Prince Siegfried made as if he would return to his own land. But King Gunther would not suffer him to depart. "Stay awhile longer," said he, and indeed he loved in his heart the bold stranger who had done such good service for him and his people against the Saxons and the Danes. Nor was Siegfried ill-content to tarry awhile, for he had a great love in his heart for the Lady Kriemhild, and he hoped that he might see her, for as yet he knew of her by report only. And so indeed it fell out. For King Gunther and his brethren took counsel with their lords to make a great feast at which the knights from all the countries round should show their valour and skill in arms. Then said Ortwein of Metz, "If you would have your feast to be of the best, then

set forth the best treasure of the land, even the matrons and maidens of Burgundy. For what more enraptures the heart or inflames than to look upon fair ladies? Then cause that the dames of Burgundy, and your sister among them, should show themselves at your feast." "This is well counselled," answered King Gunther, "and so it shall be." So he bade the Lady Uté, his mother, prepare herself, and Kriemhild her daughter, and all the ladies of her court, to be ready against the feast. Great searching, I trow, was there in presses for rich attire, and for jewels, bracelets and clasps and brooches.

On the morning of the feast King Gunther sent a hundred of his noblest knights to wait upon his sister. From out their bower came the Queen and her companions, fair ladies all of them, but fairest by far of all was Kriemhild, by so much brighter to behold than all the rest as the moon is brighter than the stars. But when Prince Siegfried saw her, there was a great tumult in his heart. "Could I dare to woo a beauty so peerless?" said he to himself; and then again, "'Twere better I should die than give up the thought of her."

Said Gernot to his brother, King Gunther: "Dear brother, requite this bold champion who has done us such service, as is meet and right. Let these two, Siegfried and Kriemhild, greet

each other. Surely if she do but greet him, 'twill make him our fast friend for ever." To this King Gunther gave a willing consent, and he sent a company of his kinsmen to Siegfried, saying, "The King invites you to come that his sister may greet you. Such honour would he do you." Glad at heart was Prince Siegfried to be so called, and he went right willingly. "Sir Siegfried," said the maiden, "you are welcome, noble knight and good." Then a great love came over the hearts of these two, and they were knit to each other for all time by a tie that should not be broken. And all that saw them thought that never before had been seen so princely a pair, more gallant knight and fairer lady. Then all the company went together to the minster to give thanks to God, and then again the maiden thanked him for all his brave deeds. "God reward you, Prince Siegfried," she said, "for all your high deservings." And he made answer, "For you and your brethren, fair lady, I am content to spend myself."

Many days thereafter did that fair company spend in all manner of sport and feasting, and even they that had been wounded crept forth into the air that they might once again make merry with their comrades, and felt health and strength come back to them as they bent the bow again and hurled the spear.

And now the prisoners, both Saxon and Dane, were about to return to their own land. Said King Gunther to Siegfried, "Now counsel me what I had best do. The two kings are willing to make alliance with me; also they will give me for their freedom as much gold as five hundred steeds can bear." Said Siegfried, "Sir King, you will do ill to take the ransom. Let them both go free; only they should promise never to come again as an enemy to the Rhineland."

This counsel pleased the King, so he sent his prisoners to their homes free of all ransom. To his own warriors he gave liberal gifts, to each man five hundred marks of gold. And now once more Siegfried was minded to go to his own country, for he had but little hope that he might win the fair Kriemhild for his bride. But when he had told his purpose, Giseller, the youngest of the three brother kings, said to him, "Why would you leave us, noble friend and true? Tarry here, I pray you, with Gunther and his liegemen. Nowhere, I trow, will you find warriors more brave, or ladies more fair." When Siegfried heard these words, he was content to tarry yet awhile. "Lead back the steeds," said he to his comrades; "I had purposed to go hence, but King Giseller has changed my intent." So for the sake both of

friendship and of love did Siegfried tarry in the Rhineland. His friends made him merry with sports and pastimes, and eased him of every care, save only his great love for Kriemhild.

CHAPTER V

THE WOOING OF BRUNHILD

KING GUNTHER purposed in his heart to marry a wife. No daughter of his own land would he woo, though there were many fair maidens in the Rhineland. But there came to him tidings of a Queen that dwelt beyond the sea; not to be matched was she for beauty, nor had she any peer for strength. Her love she proffered to any warrior who could vanquish her at three games, hurling of the spear, and putting the stone, and leaping. But if the suitor himself should be vanquished, then must he lose his head. Such were the conditions of her wooing, and many brave warriors had died for her.

On a certain day King Gunther and his chiefs sat in council, and the matter was this—where shall the King seek a wife who shall both be for a comfort to him and for a glory to the land? Then spake the King, “I will seek Queen Brunhild and no other. For her will I hazard

my life ; nor do I care to live if I may not win her for my wife." To him spake Siegfried, "I would have you give up this purpose. He who woos Brunhild plays for too high a stake. Take my counsel, sire, and go not on such a journey." "I should think it scorn," said he, "to fear a woman, were she ever so bold and strong." "Ah, sire," Siegfried made answer, "you know not how strong she is. Were you four men and not one only, you could not prevail over her." But King Gunther would not yield. "How strong soever she be, and whatever the chances that befall me, I will woo this fair Brunhild," he said. Then said Hagen, the King's uncle, "Since you are resolved to take in hand this enterprise, ask Prince Siegfried to help you." Then said King Gunther to Siegfried, "Will you help me to win this Brunhild for my wife? Do this, and ask of me what you will." Siegfried made answer, "Give me your sister, and the thing is done. I ask no other reward but that I may have the fair Kriemhild to wife." "That I promise," said the King. "Of a surety, so soon as I shall have brought the fair Brunhild to this realm, then will I give you my sister to wife ; and I pray from my heart that you may live long and happily together." Then the two sware to each other, Siegfried that he would help the King to win this strange maiden for his wife, and Gunther

that she being so won, Kriemhild should be given in marriage to Siegfried.

“Tell me now,” said Gunther, “how shall we travel to this land where Brunhild dwells? Shall we go in such state as befits a king? If you think fit, I could well bring together thirty thousand warriors.” “Thirty thousand would avail nothing,” answered Siegfried, “so strong she is and savage. We will take no army, but go as simple knights, taking two companions with us, and the two shall be Sir Hagen and Sir Dankwart.” “And wherewithal shall we be clothed?” said King Gunther. “As richly as maybe,” answered Siegfried. “My mother has a great store of goodly raiment,” said the King. Then spake Hagen, “Nay, sire, go not to the Queen, but rather to your sister. She will provide all things that you need.” So they went to the Lady Kriemhild and told her all their purpose, and how they should need goodly raiment, three changes for the day, and that for four days. With good will did the fair Kriemhild receive them, and promised that she would give them what they needed. As she promised, so she did; for she and her ladies, thirty maids skilful in the work of the needle, laboured night and day to furnish a rich store of apparel. The fair Kriemhild planned them and cut them to just measure with her own hand,

and her ladies sewed them. Silks there were, some from Arabia, white as snow, and from the Lesser Asia others, green as grass, and strange skins of fishes from distant seas, and fur of the ermine, with black spots on snowy white, and precious stones and gold of Arabia. In seven weeks all was prepared, both apparel and also arms and armour; and there was nothing that was either over-long or over-short, or that could be surpassed for comeliness. Great thanks did the warriors give to each fair seamstress, and to Kriemhild the beautiful the greatest thanks of all.

But when they were about to depart, fair Kriemhild could not keep back the fears that were in her heart. "Why will you go," she said, "dear brother, to foreign lands? Stay here at home and woo another bride. Surely you can find one fairer and nobler than Brunhild, nor put your life in jeopardy." But she could not turn the King from his purpose. Then to Siegfried she said, "This at least you may do, Sir Siegfried; I will give my brother's life into your keeping. See that no mischance befall him in Brunhild's land." Then Siegfried clasped her hand—cold as clay it was for fear—crying, "Put away your fears, fair lady; as I live, I will bring back your brother safe and sound."

So the four companions embarked on their

ship, with Siegfried for their helmsman, for he knew all the tides and currents of Rhine. Well furnished were they with food and wine and all things that they needed; and prosperous was their voyage, both while they sailed down the river and while they crossed the sea.

On the twelfth morning they came to the land of Queen Brunhild. And when King Gunther saw how the coast stretched far away, and how on every height there stood a fair castle, he said to Siegfried, "Tell me, Siegfried, if you can, whose are those castles, and this fair land. Never in all my life, I assure you, have I seen castles so fairly planned and built so well. They must have been men of might who did such work." Siegfried made answer, "These castles and this fair land are Queen Brunhild's, and this strong fortress that you see is Isenstein. And now, my comrades, I have a counsel for your ears. Let us all stand by one tale. To-day we shall stand in Queen Brunhild's court, and we must be wise and wary when we stand before her. Let therefore one and the same story be found in the mouth of all—that Gunther is my master, and that I am Gunther's man. If we would win our purpose there is no surer plan than this." So spake Siegfried to his comrades. And to the King he said, "Mark, I pray you, what I do for the love of your fair sister."

CHAPTER VI

THE WINNING OF BRUNHILD

WHILE they talked one to the other the bark drifted so near to the shore that they could see the maidens standing at the castle windows. "Who are these?" said King Gunther to Siegfried. Said Siegfried, "Look with all your eyes at these fair ladies, and tell me which of them pleases you best, and which, could you win her, you would choose for your wife." Gunther made answer, "One that I see at yonder window in a snow-white vest is surely the loveliest of all. She, if I can win her, shall surely be my wife." "You have chosen well," said Siegfried; "that maiden in the snow-white vest is Brunhild, the fairest and fiercest of women."

Meanwhile the Queen had bidden her maidens depart from the windows. "'Tis a shame," said she, "that you should make yourselves a sight for strangers." So they departed, but none the less robed them in their best for these same

strangers' sake, aye and peeped at them through every chink and cranny. But such are the ways of women.

And now came the four comrades from their bark to the castle. Siegfried led a noble charger by the bridle, and stood by the stirrup till King Gunther had mounted, serving him as a vassal serves his lord. This Brunhild marked from where she stood. "A noble lord," thought she in her heart, "whom such a vassal serves." Then Siegfried mounted his own steed, and Hagen and Dankwart did the like. A fairer company never was seen. The King and Siegfried were clothed in white, and white were their horses, and their shields flashed far as they moved. So, in lordly fashion, they rode to the hall of Queen Brunhild, and the bells of gold that hung from their saddles tinkled as they went. Hagen and Dankwart, on the other hand, wore black apparel, and their chargers were black.

When they came to the castle, there met them a chamberlain, who said, "Friends, be pleased to give me your swords and breastplates." "That may not be," answered Hagen, "we will bear them ourselves." But Siegfried spake, "This is the custom of the castle, as I know of my own knowledge, that warlike weapons shall never be borne by any guest within its walls. 'Twere best to keep to it." And Hagen did so, but with

an unwilling heart. Then the chamberlain proffered wine to the strangers, and when they had drunk he led them into the presence of the Queen.

Meanwhile the fair Brunhild inquired of her nobles who these strangers might be that had come across the sea, and on what errand they had come. One of them answered, "Fair lady, I have never seen these stout warriors, save one only, who is greatly like to the noble Siegfried. If this be he, I would have you give him a hearty welcome. Next to him is a man of right royal mien, a king, I trow, who rules with his sceptre mighty lands and herd. The third has a lowering brow, but is a stout warrior withal; the fourth is young and modest of look, but for all his gentle bearing, we should all rue it, I trow, if wrong were done to him. Then spake Queen Brunhild, "Bring me now my royal vesture; if Siegfried seeks to woo me for his wife, he must risk his life on the cast; I fear him not so much as to yield to him without a struggle." So the Queen arrayed her in her royal robes, and went to the hall of audience, and a hundred maidens and more followed her, fair of face and in fair array. And after the maidens came five hundred warriors and more, each bearing his sword in his hand, the very flower of Isenland.

Said Queen Brunhild to Siegfried, "You are

welcome, good Sir Siegfried. Show me, if you will, for what cause you have come hither." "I thank you a thousand times," answered Siegfried, 'that you have greeted me so courteously, but know that I must give place to this noble hero. He is my lord and master ; I am his vassal. Let your favour be for him. His kingdom is by the Rhine side, and we have sailed all this way from thence that he may woo you for his bride. That is his fixed intent, nor will he yield whatever may befall. Gunther is his name ; a great king is he and a wealthy, and nothing will content him but to carry you back with him to the Rhine."

Queen Brunhild answered, "If he is the master and you the man, then let him know that he must match me in my games and conquer me. If he prevail, then will I be his wedded wife ; but if I prevail, then must he die, he and you and all his comrades." Then spake Sir Hagen, "Lady, tell us now the games at which my master must contend ; and know that you must strive full hard, if you would conquer him, for he has a full trust that he will win you for his bride." The Queen answered, "He must cast the stone further than I, and also leap behind it further than I leap ; and also he must cast the spear with me. It seems to me that you are over-hasty ; let him count the cost, ere he lose both fame and life." Then Siegfried whispered to the King, "Have no fear

for what shall be, and cast away all your care. Let the fair Brunhild do what she will, I will bear you harmless." So the King spake aloud, "Fairest of the fair, tell me your pleasure; were it a greater task willingly would I undertake it, for if I win you not for my bride, willingly will I lose my head."

Then the fair Brunhild called for her battle gear, her arms, and her breastplate of gold and her mighty shield; and over all she drew a surcoat of silk, marvellously made that could turn the keenest. Fierce and angry was her countenance as she looked at the strangers, and Hagen and Dankwart were troubled to see her, for they doubted how it might go with their master. "'Tis a fatal journey," said they, "and will bring us to trouble."

Meanwhile Siegfried hied him with nimble foot to the bark, and there he took, from the secret corner where he kept it, the Hood of Darkness, by which, at his will, he could make himself invisible. Quickly did he go, and quickly returned, and now no one could see him, for he wore the hood. Through the crowd he went at his pleasure, seeing all but seen of none.

Meanwhile men had marked out the ring for the fray, and chiefs had been chosen as umpires, seven hundred men in armour who should judge betwixt the combatants. First of the two came

the fair Brunhild. So mighty was her presence, a man had thought her ready to match herself in battle with all the kings in the world. And there was carried before her a mighty shield of ruddy gold, very thick and broad and heavy, overlaid with studs of steel. Four chamberlains could scarce bear the weight. Sir Hagen, when he saw it, said, "How now, my lord King? this fair one whom you would woo must surely be the devil's wife." Next came three men who scarce could carry the Queen's javelin, with its mighty spear-head, heavy and great as though three had been melted into one. And when King Gunther saw it, he said to himself, "This is a danger from which the devil himself can scarce escape. I would that I were once more by the banks of Rhine; he that would might woo and win this fair maiden for me." Then Hagen said to Dankwart, "It was ill custom that took our weapons from us. Had we but our coats of mail upon our breasts, and our good swords by our sides, we had not been one jot afraid of all the warriors of Isenland." This the maiden heard, and said to her people, "Is he so valiant? Let them have their arms again." So they gave them their arms. Right glad was Hagen to take them, and cried, "Now play your games as you will. Gunther is safe while we have our swords." After this there was brought the mighty stone

which Brunhild was to hurl. Twelve knights could scarce support it, so big it was.

And now the Queen addressed her to the contest, rolling her sleeves about her arms, and fitting her buckler, and poising her mighty spear in her hand. And the strangers, when they saw it, were sore afraid for all their courage.

But now came Siegfried to King Gunther's side and touched his hand. Greatly amazed was the King, for he did not understand his champion's device. "Who was it that touched me?" he said, and looked round, but saw no one. "'Tis I," answered the Prince, "your trusty friend, Siegfried. Have no fear of the maiden. Let me carry the buckler; you shall seem to do each deed, but I will do it in truth. But be careful to hide the device. Should the maiden discover it, she will not spare to bring it to nought." Right glad was Gunther to know that his strong ally was at hand.

And now the Queen threw the spear with all her might against the shield, which Siegfried bore upon his arm. New was the shield and stout of make, but the spear-head passed clean through it, and rang on the hero's coat of mail, dealing him so sore a blow that the blood gushed forth from his mouth. Of a truth, but for the Hood of Darkness, that hour both the champions had died. Then Siegfried caught the great spear

in his hand, and tore it from the shield, and hurled it back. "She is too fair to slay," said he to himself, and he turned the spear point behind him, and smote the maiden with the shaft on the silken vest that she wore. Loud rang the blow, and the fire-sparks leapt from her armour. Never could Gunther, for all his strength, have dealt such a blow, for it felled the strong Brunhild to the ground. Lightly did she leap up again, crying, "King Gunther, I thank you for the blow; 'twas shrewdly given," for she thought that the King had dealt it.

But great was the wrath in her heart to find that her spear had sped in vain. And now she turned to the great stone where it lay, and poised it in her hand, and hurled it with all her might. And having hurled it, she herself leapt after it. Twelve full arms' length hurtled the great stone through the air, so mighty was the maiden, and she herself overpassed it by a pace. Then came Gunther to the place, with Siegfried unseen by his side. And Siegfried caught the stone and poised it—but it seemed to all as if Gunther did it—and threw it yet another arm's length beyond the cast of the maid, and passed the stone himself, aye, and carried King Gunther along with him so mighty was he!

But when the Queen saw that she was vanquished, she flushed with shame and wrath, and

turning to her lords, she spake aloud, "Come hither, my kinsmen and lieges. You must now be thralls of King Gunther of Burgundy." So the chiefs of Isenland laid their swords at Gunther's feet and did him homage, for they thought that he had vanquished by his own strength ; and he, for he was a very gentle, courteous knight, greeted the maid right pleasantly, and she, for her part, took him by the hand and said, "Henceforth, Sir King, all the rule and power that I have held is yours."

Now hear the craftiness of Siegfried. So soon as the contest was ended, he hid away the Hood of Darkness in a safe place, and went into the great hall, where Gunther and Hagen and Dankwart sat with Queen Brunhild and many lords and ladies of Isenland. "My lord King," said he, "why do you thus delay? When will the games begin? Let us see as soon as may be what shall be the end of them." Then spake Queen Brunhild, "How comes it, Sir Siegfried, that you have seen nought of the games, nor how I have been worsted by the King?" Then said Hagen, "Fair lady, you so troubled us by your bearing, that the noble Siegfried departed to our ships. This is the cause why he knows nothing of these things." "This is good news that I hear, fair lady," said Siegfried. "I am well pleased that your pride has had a fall, and that

you have found some one to be your master. And now you must needs come back with us to the Rhineland." "You speak truth," said the Queen, "but I must first bid farewell to my kinsmen and lieges." So all the chiefs of Isenland were called to the palace.

When they were assembled, said Queen Brunhild, "I should owe great thanks to him who should divide my gold and silver, of which, indeed, I have an ample store, between these chiefs of mine." Then said Sir Dankwart, "Fair lady, give me the key of your coffers; I will divide your treasure in such fashion as shall please you well." So the Queen gave the key of her coffers to Sir Dankwart, and right royally did he dispense her treasure. Many a poor man that day had such gifts bestowed on him that thenceforth he had no lack of livelihood. For Sir Dankwart gave gold pieces by the hundred without reckoning, and clothing of the richest without stint. Then spake the fair Brunhild in great wrath to the King, "Sire, your chamberlain is so free with my treasure that he will soon leave me nothing at all. Never had queen so spendthrift a treasurer." But Hagen spake up for his comrade: "Fear not, fair lady," he said, "the King of Rhineland has gold enough and gear that he may spend as freely as he will, and yet have no fear of poverty. Nor does he need any

of the treasure of Isenland." "'Tis well," said she ; " nevertheless I will take of my own twenty coffers full of gold, and silken stuff in plenty, and precious stones."

These things being done, they made ready to depart, King Gunther and his comrades, and Queen Brunhild with a chosen company of knights, and ladies four-score and six, and a hundred maidens that waited on them.

But Gunther said to Siegfried, " They have heard nothing at home of our doings nor of how we have sped. Do you then go with all the speed you may, and be my messenger to the Queen my mother, and to my sister Kriemhild, and to the Kings my brothers, and to all my people. Tell them all that has befallen me, and bid them make ready to receive us."

So Siegfried departed, and four-and-twenty horsemen with him. And when he came to the city of Worms, and they saw that he came without King Gunther, there was great lamenting, for they feared that he had perished in a foreign land. " Fear not," said he, " Gunther sends love and greeting to all his friends," and he told the tale, how the King had prospered in his wooing.

There is no need to tell how Gunther and Brunhild and all their company travelled to Rhineland with great joy, and how Queen Uté and her sons and the fair Kriemhild, and all the

people of the land, gave them a hearty welcome and how in due time King Gunther was married to the fair Brunhild. Nor is there need of many words to relate how Siegfried also took to wife the beautiful Kriemhild, as it had been promised him. Nor were there any to gainsay save Brunhild only, for she grudged that her husband's sister should be given to a vassal, for such in truth she deemed him to be. Very ill content she was, though the King would fain have satisfied her, saying that he was a very noble knight, and was lord of many woodlands, and had great store of gold and treasure.

So Siegfried wedded the fair Kriemhild and took her with him to his own land. A goodly welcome did the Netherlanders give her. And Siegmund gave up his kingdom to his son, and the two lived in much peace and love together ; and when in the tenth year a son was born to them, they called him by the name of his uncle Gunther.

Also Gunther and Brunhild lived together in much happiness. They also had a son, and they called him by the name of Siegfried.

CHAPTER VII

HOW THE QUEENS FELL OUT

QUEEN BRUNHILD was ill content that Siegfried being, for so she deemed, her husband's vassal, should pay no homage to his lord and do no service for his fee. And she was very urgent with her husband that he should suffer this no longer. But the King was fain to put her off. "Nay," said he, "the journey is too long. Their land is far from ours; why should we trouble him to come? Also he is a great prince and a powerful." "Be he as great as he will," she answered, "'tis a vassal's duty to pay homage to his lord." But Gunther laughed to himself. Little thought had he of homage from Siegfried. Then the Queen changed her voice. "Dear lord," she said, "how gladly would I see Siegfried and your dear sister once more. Well do I remember how fair she was and how kind, how gracious of speech when we sat together, brides both of us." With such words she persuaded her

husband. "There are no guests that would be more welcome," said he; "I will find messengers who shall bid them come to the Rhineland."

So he chose thirty men who should be his messengers, and said to them, "Take my greeting to King Siegfried and my sister, and bid them come to the festival that I shall hold at midsummer next. High honour shall they have with us and a royal welcome, so that they shall say that they never saw such festival as ours." Such was the message which the King sent by their hands, and Queen Brunhild furnished them with rich apparel from her store to make their embassy more honourable.

So the messengers went on their journey. Toilsome it was and long, for three weeks were spent ere they came to the end. And now the tidings were brought to Siegfried and his Queen that men clad as nobles are clad in Rhineland were come. Said Kriemhild to her husband, "See you the messengers whom my good brother Gunther has sent from the Rhineland?" "Yea," said he, "and welcome they are." Then the messengers delivered their message. "King Gunther and Brunhild his Queen and the lady Uté, and Sir Gernot and Sir Giseller send you their service." "I thank them from my heart," said Siegfried. "Do they need anything? Has any enemy harried their borders?" "Not so,"

said the chief of the messengers, "for they live in all peace and prosperity. They bid you to a festival, you and the lady Kriemhild, and so many of your nobles as it shall please you to bring." "That may hardly be," said Siegfried, "for we dwell too far away."

For nine days did the messengers sit and feast with their hosts of the Netherland. Meanwhile the King took counsel with his nobles. "I would fain go," said he, "but that the journey is so long." But his nobles counselled him to go, "and take," said they, "a thousand knights with you. So you shall have due honour in the Rhineland." "And I," said the old King Siegmund, "will go with you, and bring a hundred knights of my own." "Will you, dear father, go with me?" cried Siegfried; "then will I go without delay." Then he bade his treasurer give to the messengers gold and raiment for gifts, and sent them home rejoicing.

Great was the joy in Rhineland when the messengers returned and told how they had been welcomed and royally entertained and loaded with gifts, and how that Siegfried and his Queen Kriemhild and the old King Siegmund and a company of gallant knights were coming to the festival. Great was the joy and manifold the preparations. The builders built seats with costly trappings, and Ortwein the server and Sindold

the butler laboured might and main. But none was so busy as Rumold, the chief of the cooks. How the pots and pans and caldrons rattled and rang, and what a store of dishes did the chief of the cooks and his helpers make for the guests!

So King Siegfried and his Queen, the fair Kriemhild, set forth on the journey; but their boy they left behind, for it was not well that he should travel so far. For many days they journeyed, and when they were a day's march distant they sent swift couriers before them to warn King Gunther of their coming.

No sooner did the King hear the news than he sought out Queen Brunhild where she sat in her chamber. "Bear you in mind," said he, "how Kriemhild my sister welcomed you when you came hither from your own land. Do you, therefore, dear wife, welcome her with the like affection." "So shall it be," answered the Queen.

And indeed, when the guests came on the morrow, right royal was the welcome that they had. For Gunther and Brunhild rode forth from the city to meet them, and greeted them most heartily. The chiefs grasped each other by the hand, and the ladies kissed each other, and all was mirth and jollity. Never was served in the hall a more plenteous feast; never did the red wine flow in more abundance than when King Gunther of Rhineland gave entertainment to

Siegfried and Siegmund from the Netherland. By the day there were tilts and tournaments and sports of every kind, and at night there was feasting in the hall. Also day by day they sang the mass in the minster, for the good knights from either land were wont to assemble there before the sports began. And so they did for twelve days.

But Brunhild ever cherished a thought of mischief in her heart. "Why," she said to herself, "why has Siegfried stayed so long to do homage for, that which he holds of us in fee? I shall not be content till Kriemhild answer me in this."

It fell out on a certain day, while sundry knights were sitting in the castle court, that the two Queens sat together. The fair Kriemhild then began, "My husband is so mighty a man that he should rule these kingdoms of right." "Nay," answered Brunhild, "that might be were you and your husband only alive, and all others dead, but so long as Gunther lives he must needs be King." Then said fair Kriemhild, "See how he shines among the knights, a very moon among the stars." Brunhild answered, "However brave and strong he may be, and stately to look upon, Gunther, your brother, is better than he." "Nay," said Kriemhild, "better he is not, nay, nor even his peer." "How say you?" answered Brunhild

in wrath ; " I spake not without cause. When I saw the two for the first time, when the King, my husband, constrained me to yield to him, then I heard with my own ears how Siegfried confessed that he was Gunther's man. Yea, I heard him say it, and I hold him to be such." " This is folly," said Kriemhild ; " think you that my brothers could have used me so ill as to give me to be bride to a vassal ? Away, Brunhild, with such idle talk, if we would still be friends." " I will not away with it," Brunhild made answer. " Shall I renounce the service which he and all the other vassals are bound to render to their lord ?" " Renounce it you must," cried Kriemhild in great wrath. " The service of a vassal he will never do ; he is of higher degree than Gunther my brother, though Gunther is a noble King." " You bear yourself far too proudly," answered Brunhild ; " I will see without delay whether men pay you such respect and honour as they pay to me." " So shall it be," said Kriemhild. " I am ready for the trial. You shall see to-day that I dare enter the minster before the Queen of Rhineland."

Then Kriemhild bade her maidens adorn themselves in their richest. " Suffer not your mistress," said she, " to be put to shame, for the Queen will have it that I am not her peer.' So her ladies clad themselves with all the splendour

that they might, silks from Arabia and gold and jewels. And as for Kriemhild herself, she had outshone the wives of thirty kings.

Much did all men marvel to see the two Queens come to the minster each with her separate train, not together as they had been wont before. And they marvelled yet more when Kriemhild and her ladies entered the minster, but Brunhild and her ladies tarried without.

But the deadliest cause of quarrel was yet to come. Said Queen Kriemhild to Queen Brunhild when next she saw her: "Think you that when you were vanquished in your own land it was Gunther, my brother, that vanquished you?" "Yea," answered the Queen, "did I not see it with my own eyes?" "Nay," said Kriemhild, "it was not so. See you this ring?" And she took a ring that she had upon her finger and held it forth. "Do you know it?" And Brunhild looked and knew it for her own. "That," said Kriemhild, "Siegfried, my husband, took from you when you were smitten by his spear and knew not what had befallen you, so sore was the blow. You saw him not, for he had the Hood of Darkness on him and was invisible. But it was he that smote you with the spear, and put the stone further than you, and passed you in the leap. And this ring he gave me for a token, if ever you should boast yourself against me. Talk,

therefore, no more of lords and vassals. My husband feigned this vassalage that he might deceive you the more readily."

But Brunhild held her peace, for the ring was a proof which she could not gainsay. She held her peace, but she cherished her rage, keeping it in the depths of her heart, and swore that she would be avenged on the man that had so deceived her.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW SIEGFRIED WAS BETRAYED AND SLAIN

WHEN Hagen saw that Queen Brunhild was in continual trouble and sadness, he would fain have known the cause. "'Tis of Siegfried's doing," she answered. "He has wronged me beyond pardon." And she besought him that he would avenge her and King Gunther upon him. Then Hagen called to council Ortwein of Metz and Gernot and Giselher and other chiefs of the Rhineland. And some said one thing and some another. Young Giselher spake out boldly against such wickedness. "He is too noble," he said, "that he should be slain for the sake of an angry woman." And King Gunther was of the same mind: "He has given us," said he, "only love and honour; how can I work him ill? Think, too, what a mighty chief he is! 'Twere best to leave him alone." "For all his might," said Ortwein of Metz, "I can find a way to bring him to his end."

That day the chiefs left the matter without conclusion. But Hagen was ever urgent with the King that Siegfried should be slain; for "think," said he, "what new dominions will you gain if he die." But Gunther doubted. Only now he doubted more whether the deed could be done. "Restrain your anger," he said; "what has he not done for the welfare and honour of the state! And also he is so stout of body, that had he but an inkling of your purpose we should pay full dearly for it." "Fear not, my lord," said Hagen, "I will guide the matter right." "How shall that be?" said King Gunther. "Hearken," answered Hagen, "and you shall hear my plan. Do you cause messengers to come hither as if from an enemy, denouncing war against you; only be sure that they are men whom no one knows. Then you will call all your lieges to do battle. He, be sure, will not be behind in proffering his service. So shall he give us an occasion to slay him." So Hagen spake, and King Gunther took his counsel to his own shame and ruin.

On the fourth morning from the plotting of this evil plot came certain men who affirmed that they came from Ludeger, King of the Saxons, the same that Siegfried had conquered in years gone by, and demanded that they should be brought into the presence of the King. So they were brought

into the audience-chamber, and the King bade them be seated. "Nay, Sir King," said they, "we may not sit till we have performed our errand. We are come from Ludegast, King of the Danes, and Ludeger, King of the Saxons, to defy you to battle. Ill did you entreat them in time past, and now they are minded to be avenged." And when the false messengers had so spoken, they were bestowed in guest-chambers in the palace. And now the King was seen to whisper with his chiefs, and his countenance was sad and troubled. "What troubles you?" said Siegfried. And Gunther made answer, "We have cause for sorrow, for the two Kings Ludeger and Ludegast have sworn that they will ravage my realm." "Be of good cheer," said Siegfried, "I will lower their pride again as I did of old. Sit by your hearth, if you will, you and your warriors; we will deal with these boasters."

So Siegfried and his knights made them ready to depart, and of the chiefs of Rhineland not a few offered themselves as comrades, knowing nothing of the treachery that Hagen and his fellows were preparing against him.

But before they departed Hagen went to bid farewell to Queen Kriemhild. Said she, "I have good comfort in my heart to think how valiant a husband I have, and how zealous he is to help his friends, for believe me that I have loved my

kinsmen always, nor ever wished them ill." "Tell me, dear lady," said Hagen, "what service I can do to your husband, for there is no one whom I love better than him." The Queen made answer, "I have no fear that my lord will fall in battle by any man's sword, save only that he is too ready to follow even to rashness his own warlike spirit." "Well, dear lady," said Hagen, "if there is any danger which you hold in special fear, tell me that I may defend him against it." Then Kriemhild, in the simpleness of her heart, told him the secret. "In years gone by," said she, "my husband slew a dragon among the mountains, and when he had slain the monster, he bathed himself in its blood. So mighty was the charm, that thenceforth no steel had power to wound him. And yet, for all this, I am ever in fear lest by some mischance a weapon should pierce him. Harken now, my cousin, for you are of my kindred, hearken, and see how I put my trust in your honour. While Siegfried washed his limbs in the blood of the dragon, there fell a leaf from a linden tree between his shoulders. There and there only can steel harm him." "'Tis easy," said the false Hagen, "for me to defend so small a spot. Only do you sew a little token on his cloak, that I may the better know the spot that most needs protection when we stand together in the fight." "I will do so," said the Queen; "I will sew a little cross

with threads of silk on his cloak, and you will guard him when he fights in the throng of his foes." "That will I do, dear lady," said the traitor Hagen.

Hagen went straightway to King Gunther and said, "I have learnt that which I needed to know; put off this march; let us go on a hunt. So that which we would do will be easier done." "I will order that," answered the King.

On the morrow Siegfried set out with his thousand knights, and many of the Rhinelanders with them. But ere they had journeyed many miles there came men who feigned themselves to be messengers from the two kings. "Our master," they said, "would have friendship with the Rhineland, not war." Siegfried was ill-pleased to turn back, and could scarcely be persuaded so to do. But King Gunther went to him and said, "Now God reward you for your kindness. Surely of all friends you are the best and surest. But now that there is no enemy with whom to deal, let us go a-hunting to the forest of Wach; there is a great store of bears and wild boars, as I have proved many times." "So be it," said Siegfried, "only lend me a huntsman and hounds." "One huntsman," said the King, "will not suffice; you shall have four who know every track in the forest. Be sure that having them you will not come empty-handed home."

Thus did the evil-hearted King with Hagen plot Siegfried's death. Gernot and Giselher would not join the hunting, but being aware of the treachery they gave no warning of it, for they feared the anger of their brother the King.

Siegfried, before he set out for the hunting, bade farewell to his wife : "God grant," said he, "that we may soon meet happily again ; meanwhile be merry among your kinsfolk here." But Kriemhild thought of how she had discovered the secret to Hagen, and was sore afraid, yet dared not tell the truth. Only she said to her husband, "I pray you to leave this hunting. Only this night past I had an evil dream. I saw two wild boars pursuing you over the heath, and the flowers were red as with blood. Greatly I fear some treason, my Siegfried." "Nay," said he, "that is against all reason. There is not one in Rhineland here that bears me ill-will. Whom have I wronged?" "I know not," answered the Queen, "but yet my heart bodes evil. For I had yet another dream. I seemed to see two mountains fall with a terrible noise on your head. If you go, you will break my heart." But he laughed at her fears, and took her in his arms and kissed her, and so departed.

Then Siegfried went on his hunting, and Gunther and Hagen went with him, and a company of hunters and hounds. And they took

with them a great store of provisions, meet for a King's table. When they came to the forest Siegfried said, "Now who shall begin the hunting?" Hagen made answer, "Let us divide into two companies ere we begin, and each shall beat the coverts as he will; so shall we see who is the more skilful in the chase." "I need no pack," said Siegfried; "give me one well-trained hound that can track the game through the coverts. That will suffice for me." So a lime-hound was given to him. All that the good hound started did Siegfried slay; no beast could outrun him or escape him. A wild boar first he slew, and next to the boar a lion; he shot an arrow through the beast from side to side. After the lion he slew a buffalo and four elks, and a great store of game besides, so that the huntsmen said, "Leave us something in our woods, Sir Siegfried."

King Gunther bade blow the horn for breakfast. When Siegfried's huntsman heard the blast he said: "Our hunting-time is over; we must back to our comrades." So they went with all speed to the trysting-place. But as they went they roused a great bear from a thicket. "See there," cried Siegfried, "let slip the hound; I spy a great bear in the covert yonder." So the huntsman slipped the hound, and the bear broke away from the covert. At the first Siegfried thought to overtake

him by the swiftness of his horse ; but a tree had fallen in the way and hindered the pursuit. So the hero leapt from his horse and followed the chase on foot. Soon did he overtake the beast ; and having overtaken, he threw a rope about him and bound him fast. And when he had bound him, he tied him fast to his saddle-bow, and so rode to the trysting-place. Ah me ! he was a noble sight that day with his great boar-spear in his hand, and his good sword Balmung hanging by his side, and a hunting-horn of gold. Of dark samite was his coat, and his cap of sable, and for a cloak he wore the hide of a lynx.

When he came to the trysting-place he loosed the band from the bear, and the great beast chanced to leap where the cooks were making ready the breakfast. How he chased them from their place, and upset the pans, and scattered the savoury dishes in the fire ! And now all the hounds were uncoupled, and followed the prey, and the warriors leapt up each with his boar-spear in his hand. But none dared to throw his spear, so many were the hounds that chased the prey before them. So they ran, dogs and men, but 'twas the swift-footed Siegfried that overtook him and slew him with a single blow of his sword.

This done, the whole company sat down to their meal. There was plenty of every kind, but

the wine was wanting. "How is this?" said Siegfried: "the kitchen is plentiful; but where is the wine?" Said Gunther the King, "'Tis Hagen's fault, who makes us all go dry." "True, Sir King," said Hagen, "my fault it is; I sent the wine-flasks to the Spessart, not thinking that here we should have our meal. But I know of a runnel, cold and clear, that is hard by. Let us go thither and quench our thirst." Then Siegfried rose from his place, for his thirst was sore, and would have sought the place. Said Hagen, when he saw him rise, "I have heard say that there is no man in all the land so fleet of foot as Siegfried. Will he deign to let us see his speed?" "With all my heart," cried the hero. "Let us race from hence to the runnel." "'Tis agreed," said Hagen the traitor. "Furthermore," said Siegfried, "I will carry all the equipment that I bare in the chase." So Gunther and Hagen stripped them to their shirts, but Siegfried carried sword and spear, all his hunting-gear, and yet was far before the two at the runnel. Yet, such was his courtesy, that he would not drink before the King had quenched his thirst. He was ill repaid, I trow, for his grace. For when the King had drunk, as Siegfried knelt plunging his head into the stream, Sir Hagen took his spear and smote him on the little crosslet mark that was worked on his cloak between his shoulders. And



SIEGFRIED WITH THE BEAR.

when he had struck the blow he fled in mortal fear. When Siegfried felt that he was wounded, he rose with a great bound from his knees and sought for his weapons. But these the false Hagen had taken and laid far away. Only the shield was left. This he took in his hand and hurled at Hagen with such might that it felled the traitor to the ground, and was itself broken to pieces. If the hero had but had his good sword Balmung in his hand, the murderer had not escaped with his life that day.

Then all the Rhineland warriors gathered about him. Among them was King Gunther, making pretence to lament. To him said Siegfried, "Little it profits to bewail the man whose murder you have plotted. Did I not save you from shame and defeat? Is this the recompense that you pay? And yet even of you I would ask one favour. Have some kindness for my wife. She is your sister; if you have any knightly faith and honour remaining, guard her well." Then there came upon him the anguish of death. Yet one more word he spake, "Be sure that in slaying me you have slain yourselves." And when he had so spoken he died.

Then they laid his body on a shield and carried it back, having agreed among themselves to tell this tale, that Sir Siegfried having chosen to hunt by himself was slain by robbers in the wood.

CHAPTER IX

HOW KRIEMHILD MOURNED FOR SIEGFRIED

NOT yet was the rage of Hagen against Siegfried and Kriemhild satisfied. For he bade his men take the corpse, and cast it down before the door of the chamber wherein sat Kriemhild, knowing nought of the fate that had befallen her husband. "She will find him," he said, "when she goes on the morrow to say her prayers in the church."

And so it fell out. When the church bells rang early, as was the custom, the fair Kriemhild rose and called to her maidens, and bade them bring her garments that she might go to the church. But by this a chamberlain had spied the corpse, though he knew not that it was his master. "Tarry awhile, lady," he cried, "there is a murdered knight across the threshold." When she heard these words, she bethought her of the thing that she had told to Hagen, and she fell in a swoon to the ground. And then, reviving, she cried aloud. "'Tis a stranger," said the ladies.

But she said, "Not so; it is Siegfried; he is slain; 'twas Brunhild that counselled the deed, and Hagen that struck the blow."

Then she went and knelt by the dead, and raised his head with her hand, and said, "Woe is me! it was no foeman that slew you in fair fight; some traitor has done the deed." And she bewailed her husband with bitter cries and many tears.

Meanwhile the evil tidings had been carried to the old King Siegmund, and to the chiefs of the Netherland, and to the warriors who had come with the two Kings to the Rhineland. Then they gathered themselves together in arms, ready to take vengeance for the dead. But Queen Kriemhild, for all the rage and grief that was in her heart, counselled caution. "My lord," said she to Siegmund, her father-in-law, "put by your thoughts of vengeance till some more convenient season. You cannot strive against such odds, for our enemies are thirty to one. God shall requite them in His good time. But now help me to lay my dear husband here in his coffin." And Siegmund and the warriors listened to her counsel.

Great was the grief through the fair city of Worms, and all the greater because no one knew why so blameless a knight had been slain.

Then the smiths and the joiners made a coffin

for the dead man, stout planks of oak, with brass and iron about them, and fair adornings of gold and silver. Therein they laid the King, and bore him to the minster, where the priests sang the requiem for his soul.

Thither came King Gunther and Hagen, though they had done better to stay away. "My heart is sad for your loss, dear sister," said the King. "Nay, brother," said she, "had it been sad indeed, that loss had never been. But now, let any one who would show himself guiltless in this matter, come near to the bier." For, indeed, strange to say, if the murderer come near to him whom he has murdered, the wounds will bleed afresh. And so it now fell out. For when Hagen came near to the dead man's bier, the wounds burst out again. Then spoke King Gunther: "I give you my word that Siegfried was slain by robbers; Hagen struck never a blow." But Kriemhild said, "I know these robbers but too well. 'Twas you, false Gunther and false Hagen, that slew him."

After this Kriemhild bade her chamberlain give largess for the dead to all the poor of the city. And when this was done, she said, "Three days and three nights will I keep him, that I may take my fill in looking upon the dead." So she abode by the bier and the priests prayed and sang requiems for him, till the time was ended, and

they carried the body to the place where it should be laid. Yet even then, ere they put it away out of sight, Kriemhild commanded that they should open the coffin once more, that she might see his face yet once again.

On the morrow King Siegmund with the Netherlanders would ride again to his home, and he would fain have persuaded Kriemhild to go with him. But she would not. "Nay," said she, "I must stay in my own land and among my own kindred. My son I trust to you, but here I stay."

So Siegmund and his company departed, and Kriemhild stayed behind in Rhineland.

Nor yet had Hagen ended his misdeeds. For three years and six months did Kriemhild sit mourning for the dead. Not a word did she speak to Gunther her brother; on Hagen she never set her eyes. Said Hagen to Gunther, "'Twere well could you make friends with your sister, for the great treasure of the Nibelungs is hers, and it would be a glory to the Rhineland to possess it." "My brothers," said the King, "have a firm friendship with her. Haply she will hearken to them." And so it was, for Gernot and Giselher, not without many words, persuaded her to be reconciled to King Gunther. Freely she forgave him, and the two kissed each other with many tears; but Hagen she could not pardon, for

he, as well she knew, had dealt the deadly blow with his own hand.

After a while Kriemhild bade her brothers Gernot and Giselher fetch the Nibelungs' treasure from the mountain where it lay hid in the keeping of Alberic the dwarf and his stout fellows, and with them she sent four thousand warriors. Said Alberic the dwarf to his comrades, "This treasure is the Queen's of right, nor must we withhold it from her. Ah me! it is a grievous pity that Siegfried took from us the Hood of Darkness." So Alberic the dwarf gave up the treasure to the messengers of Kriemhild.

Gernot and Giselher and their comrades made such shift as they could to carry the treasure down to the sea, and from the sea up the river Rhine. Truly it was a wondrous hoard, as much as could be carried in twelve stout waggons, which should labour without ceasing for four days; all of gold and gems, and more precious than aught beside, the wishing-rod of gold which gave to him who should find it power to rule over the whole world.

So they carried the treasure to Queen Kriemhild and delivered it into her hands, and she caused it to be stored away in the palace where she dwelt. Full to the utmost, I trow, were the chambers of the palace with that wondrous store; yet she had been well content to lose it all if she

could have brought back from the dead Siegfried her dearest lord.

An open hand had the fair Kriemhild, and with her bounty she drew many a valiant knight about her, till Hagen said to the King, "Should Queen Kriemhild live here but a short space longer, she will win over to her so many that it will fare but ill with us." "The wealth is her own," said Gunther. "It matters nought to me how she spends it." "Nay," answered Hagen, "it matters much. 'Tis folly to leave such treasure in a woman's hands. She may use it in such fashion as to make the Rhineland rue the spending of it for ever." "I swear a great oath to her," said King Gunther, "that I would harm her no more, and that oath will I keep." Said Hagen, "Then let me take the blame."

Said Sir Gernot to Giseller his brother, "Better to sink the treasure in the Rhine than that it should trouble us in this fashion." And this they purposed to do, but Hagen was beforehand with them. At Lochheim he sank it, in a place that he kept secret to himself, thinking that he should one day have it for his own. But this was not to be.

So was Kriemhild widowed of her husband, and so was the treasure taken from her by fraud.

CHAPTER X

HOW KING ETZEL COURTED THE QUEEN KRIEMHILD

DAME HELCA that was Queen of King Etzel, whom some called Attila the Hun, being dead, the King was minded to take to himself another wife, and all his friends counselled him to make suit to Kriemhild, the widow of Siegfried. "How can that be?" said the King, "I am a heathen, and she is a Christian woman. 'Twere a marvel indeed should she consent." But his knights made answer, "A King of such might and fame can scarce sue in vain. 'Twere well, at the least, to make trial." Then said King Etzel, "Is there any one here that knows the Rhineland?" "That do I," answered the Margrave Rudeger, "I know the land, and King Gunther and his two brethren, Gernot and Giselher, good knights all of them." "And this same Kriemhild," asked the King, "is she worthy to wear the crown?" "There is no fairer woman in the world," answered Rudeger.

‘Go then,” said the King, “and seek her for my bride.” “I will go,” said Rudeger, “and take five hundred knights with me, so that the Rhinelanders may say that no King has ever sent a nobler company to woo for him. But remember, my lord, that her first husband was Siegfried, a very noble prince.” “Yea,” said the King, “I know; and she shall be honoured accordingly.”

So Rudeger rode with his company to the Rhineland. And when they arrived none knew who they were and whence they came, no one, that is to say, but Hagen. For Hagen, when he saw them, said, “If I guess aright, this is the famous Margrave of the Huns, Rudeger; but ’tis many years since I saw him.” “’Tis scarce to be believed,” said King Gunther, “that he should come so far.” But even as he spake, Hagen knew for a certainty that it was indeed he.

A hospitable welcome did the King and his chiefs give to King Etzel’s messengers. And these, the proper time being come, stood up and acquitted them of their errand. “And first,” said their spokesman, “I must tell you that the fair Queen Helca is dead.” “That is ill news,” said Gernot. “And now, if I may speak boldly,” said the Margrave, “I will unfold the chief purpose of my coming. It has come to my master’s ears

that Sir Siegfried is dead, and the fair Queen Kreimhild left a widow, and he desires to know whether you consent that she wear the crown in the kingdom of the Huns." "'Twould pleasure me should she consent thereto," answered King Gunther, "but I must first know her mind."

King Etzel's messengers were royally entertained for three days, and in the meanwhile King Gunther took counsel with his nobles whether this marriage was expedient or no. All spake with one voice advising it, but Hagen said nay, "If you are wise, you will not suffer it, though Kriemhild herself consent." "Why should I hinder it, if it please her?" answered Gunther. "She is my sister. If she will have this queen-dom, let her have it." Said Sir Hagen, "If you knew King Etzel as I know him, you would see that this marriage would be, or soon or late, for your ruin." "But why should I fear?" said the King; "King Etzel is far away from us. Whether he weds my sister or no, he can work us no ill." And Gernot and Giselher, when the King asked their counsel, said the same thing, rebuking also Hagen for his hardness of heart. "Why should you not do that which is right and just?" said Giselher. "You have done her a great wrong, and caused her to shed many tears. Make to her now such atonement as maybe." And Gernot said, "Never had woman better cause to hate

a man, than Kriemhild has cause to hate you. Do her not, therefore, further wrong." But Sir Hagen still said the same thing, "If the lady Kreimhild wed King Etzel, he will work us grievous woe." But he spoke in vain.

Then went Sir Gere to the lady Kriemhild, and said, "Give me the guerdon of good news, fair lady. The mightiest of all Kings has sent hither the noblest of his knights to ask you in marriage!" But Kriemhild answered, "Now why do you make a mock of a lonely widow? Such proffer of love is not for me." Then her two brothers Gernot and Giselher came and besought her in many words that she should yield in this thing, for that it would turn to her true good and happiness, but they could not persuade her. And when they had urged her long time in vain, "At least," said they, "you will see the King's messengers." "That will I do," answered the Queen; "gladly will I see the Margrave Rudeger face to face, for I have heard of his manifold virtues. But had the messenger been any other he had not seen me. Bring him to my chamber to-morrow morning." And she wept again.

Right glad was the noble Rudeger to hear these words, for he doubted not, so wise of words was he, that he could persuade the Queen. So on the morrow he went to the palace, and many

good knights with him. There Kriemhild awaited him, and all her ladies about her were decked out in their choicest garments, but she was clad in her everyday attire. And when she knew of his coming, she went to the door to meet him. Said he, "Daughter of Kings, deign, I pray you, to hear the message which I and my comrades bring from our master." "Speak," she made answer, "as you will; I am willing to listen to so noble a herald." Then said Rudeger, "King Etzel, who is, as you well know, a mighty king, has sent us to seek your favour. He offers you his steadfast love; that which he bare to Queen Helca, who is departed this life, he will henceforth bear to you." "Sir Rudeger," the Queen made reply, "no one who has seen such sorrow as I have seen would bind herself in wedlock a second time." "Nay, fair lady," answered the bold Rudeger, "what is a better remedy for sorrow than love? If you will deign to listen to my master's suit, he will give you twelve kingdoms which he has conquered with his own hands, and you shall have all the worship and homage from knight and lady that the Queen Helca had while she was yet alive." "Nay," said the Queen, "what boots it to speak of kingdoms and homage? Such a loss have I suffered that I must needs sit in sorrow to the end of my life." "Fair lady," answered Rudeger,

“were you King Etzel’s Queen, you would sit not in sorrow but in happiness.” “Go now, said Kriemhild, “and come again on the morrow; then shall you have my answer.”

When the messengers had departed, she sent for her mother, and for Giselher her brother. “Nothing,” she said, “befits me now but tears only.” “Nay, sister dear,” said Giselher, “King Etzel will comfort you. There is not a king so mighty from the Elbe to the Rhine.” “This is ill counsel, my brother,” said Kriemhild. “And think, too: if ever I was comely in time past, I am comely now no more.” Then spake Queen Uté, her mother, “Follow your brothers’ counsel, my child. You have had enough of sorrow and mourning.” Then Kriemhild thought within herself, “My own kindred counsel me to do this thing; but can I consent to it? Shall I, who am a Christian woman, wed with a heathen? It may not be.” So did she leave the matter; but all night long she turned it over in her mind, weeping continually.

The next morning came Rudeger, and urged his master’s suit again in many words. But he prevailed nothing, till at the last he whispered in her ear, “Whatsoever you have suffered, fair lady, that will I make good again.” For when she heard these words, her heart was greatly turned, and she was inclined to that which before

she greatly disliked. Then he said again, "Though you had no friend among the Hunsfolk but me and my kinsmen, and them that hold of me, verily he that has done you wrong shall have good cause to repent." "Swear to me now," answered she, "that you will be the first to right my wrongs." "That will I do right willingly," said the Margrave Rudeger; and he swear a great oath that he and his would serve her truly and deny her nothing that concerned her honour. Then she thought to herself, "Now shall I have vengeance for my dear husband's life." But to Rudeger she said, "Now were not your lord a heathen, I would not refuse to listen to his suit." Answered the Margrave, "But, lady, though the King be a heathen, yet he has many Christian men among his warriors. And who knows but that you will win him to the faith?" Her brothers also were instant with her, that she should put away her sorrow, and plight her troth to the King.

When the lady Kriemhild was making ready to depart, she bethought her of the gold that she had, for there was yet something left of the Nibelung hoard; and this she was minded to divide among the Huns. When Sir Hagen heard of this, he said, "This must not be. Why should such treasure go to our enemies? For well I know what Kriemhild will do with this gold

should she be suffered to possess it. She will use it to stir up hatred against me. She shall not have it. Tell her that Hagen purposes to keep it here." When the Queen heard this message, she was greatly angered. So also were the Kings her brothers, but they could not change Hagen's purpose. Then said the Margrave Rudeger, "Why trouble you yourself, fair lady, about this gold? Surely when King Etzel sees you, he will give more gold than ever you will have the power to spend." "Most noble Rudeger," answered the Queen, "never had a king's daughter such treasure as that of which Sir Hagen has despoiled me." Then Gernot went to the treasury and took out thence thirty thousand gold pieces which they would have given to their sister. But still Rudeger would have none of it. "I brought," said he, "enough and to spare from my own country; and we can pay all charges of our journey homeward without help of the Rhineland gold."

Said Kriemhild to the knights about her, "Now who is willing to come with me into exile in the land of the Huns?" Out spake the Margrave Erkewart, "I have served long in your household, and I will serve you yet unto my dying day; and I will bring also with me five hundred knights, good men and true all of them; nor shall aught but death divide us." Then the

Queen bowed her head, for her heart was so full that she could not speak a word.

On the morrow the palfreys were brought forth, and the fair Kriemhild departed. A hundred maidens had she with her all in fitting attire. Amidst many tears did she depart. Gernot and Giselher, and a thousand warriors with them, brought her on her journey so far as the Danube. But King Gunther went but a short way from the city.

But before they set out, there had gone before them to the land of the Huns, couriers swift of foot who should tell the King that his wooing had prospered.

CHAPTER XI

HOW KRIEMHILD SENT FOR HER KINDRED

WHEN they came to the Danube the men of Rhineland judged it best to return to their own country. Said Giseler to his sister, "If you stand in need at any time of help, fair lady, fail not to let me know, and we will willingly come to your help, even as far as King Etzel's land." So he and his men turned them homewards.

Meanwhile Kriemhild and her company journeyed on towards Hunland, being received with great courtesy whithersoever they came. But none gave her a more hearty welcome than did the Lady Gotelind that was wife to the Margrave Rudeger.

When King Etzel heard that the fair Kriemhild was on her way he rode forth to meet her, and a great company of knights went with him. Many a strange speech might one have heard that day, for the King's men came from countries far and

wide. Some were Christians, and heathens some. Russians were there, and Poles, and men from Wallachia, and from Denmark, and many a land beside. Great and valiant chiefs were there, among them Haward, and Iring, and Irnfried, and Sir Bloedelin, that was brother to the King. But not one was greater or dearer to the King than Dietrich of Bern.

When the King came near, said Rudeger to the Queen, "Here is King Etzel and his chiefs. Now be ready to kiss such as I shall tell you.' Then they took her down from her palfrey, and the King also dismounted and bade her welcome. She raised her veil, her face glowing the while with rosy colour. First she kissed King Etzel, as was meet, and then Bloedelin his brother, and King Gibeck, and Dietrich of Bern, and others, some twelve in all.

After these things, in due course fair Kriemhild was wedded to King Etzel with much solemnity. For seventeen days the feast was held, with jousting, and divers sports, and royal banquetings. And the Queen was well content. Only she could not altogether forget the noble Siegfried, the husband whom she first had loved.

For six years the royal pair dwelt together in peace. And the Queen bare a son to her husband, to his great content. Nor would Kriemhild be content till the child was brought to the font to

be christened. So he was brought in due time, and the name of Ortlieb was given to him.

After a while she thought in her heart, "Now shall I ever be able to bring Hagen to this land and avenge myself on him for all the wrongs that he has done me." It was, I trow, some evil spirit that put the thing into the Queen's heart, seeing that she had freely forgiven all, save Hagen only, when she came from the Rhineland to the country of the Huns.

So she spake to the King her husband, "Dear lord, I would fain ask a favour of you. 'Tis that I may have some proof that you hold my kinsfolk in honour and affection." Said the King, for he was a man without guile, "Gladly would I do any grace that I may to these warriors, seeing that from them I have one whom I love so well." The Queen answered, "My kinsfolk have never come hither to see me; I am alone in this land, and I am called the foreigner." Then said the King, "I will bid all whom you would fain see that they visit us here, if it be not too far." The Queen was glad at heart when she heard these words. "Send now an envoy to the Rhineland," said she, "with this gracious message in his mouth. Soon shall I have many visitors." "It shall be done," answered King Etzel, "as you desire."

On the morrow King Etzel called him two minstrels and bade them make ready to go to the

Rhineland. "Then," said he, "you shall bid the kinsfolk of the Queen come hither without fail that we may keep together my wedding feast. 'Twere a sorry feast if they should not be there." Said one of the minstrels, "On what day do you purpose to hold your wedding feast, that I may declare the time plainly to them that shall ask me?" The King answered, "On Midsummer Day next coming."

The Queen bade her people bring the two minstrels to her chamber, for that she would speak with them in private. "Do my errand faithfully," said she, "and I will give you a royal reward. First, therefore, take care that you say not to any in Rhineland that you have seen me in melancholy mood. Beg my kindred also that they hearken to the King in this matter, for that the Huns believe that I have not any friends. And say to Gernot my brother that I love no one more than I love him. And tell Giselher that I would fain see him; and let my brother know how honourable is my state in this land. But, above all things, take good care that Hagen come with them, for no man has such knowledge as he of the roads between Rhineland and this country."

So the minstrels went their way, and came in due course to the fair city of Worms. "Who are these?" said King Gunther. But no one knew, save Sir Hagen only, and he, so soon as he saw

them, said, "Your sister has sent these minstrels from her country to the Rhineland. Now, for her sake and also for the sake of King Etzel you must make them right welcome." So when they were brought into the King's presence, he said to them, "Ye are welcome, ye minstrels of the Huns. Ye are sent, as I understand, by Etzel, the great King." "So it is," answered the two, "and the King sends you his service and Queen Kriemhild greets you well." "How fares it with them?" said Gunther. "They live," said the minstrels, "in great happiness and content. And now will we tell our errand. The King and the Queen entreat you that you will come into their country. It is now a long time since they have seen you, and they would fain know whether they have offended you in aught." "In a week's time," answered the King, "we will answer you on this matter."

Then King Gunther called his chiefs together, and said to them, "What shall we do? Shall we go into King Etzel's country, or shall we forbear?" And all the chiefs answered him with one voice that they should go. Only Hagen said in secret to the King, "You know as well as I what we did, and how, for reason of this, we must ever be fearful of Queen Kriemhild. Seeing that I slew her husband with my own hand, shall I dare to take this journey?" "Nay," answered

King Gunther, "it is not so. My sister has put away her wrath. Did she not grant her pardon with kisses and much love ere she went from this land? Though it may well be, Hagen, that she keeps her hatred for you." But Hagen answered, "Be sure, that if ever you see Kriemhild you shall lose both life and honour. The Queen Kriemhild will not lightly forego her vengeance." Then said Prince Giselher, "You have good cause to fear her, Sir Hagen. Do you therefore abide at home, and be careful of yourself." "Not so," cried the knight of Traye, "I will bare you company, whatever befall." Then said Rumold, the chief of the cooks: "If ye will not hearken to Hagen, hearken to me who have served you well. Tarry ye here. Let Kriemhild be content with her husband there. How should ye fare better there than ye fare here? Have ye not meat and drink enough and faithful lieges? What will ye do among the Hunnish folk? Go not thither, my lord. This is the counsel of Rumold, the chief of the cooks." "Nay," answered Gernot, "here will we not tarry in such churlish fashion now that Kriemhild our sister and King Etzel have sent us so friendly a bidding." "Well," said Hagen, "you set my counsel at nought and are bent to go on this ill journey. But listen to me at least in this: go well armed, as if for battle. Send for the best of your warriors, and let me choose from

them a thousand at the least to ride with you.”
“It is well,” said they.

So the Kings sent through the Rhineland, and called the bravest of their warriors together. There came Dankwart, the brother of Sir Hagen, with four-score knights ; and Volker, the high-born minstrel ; and many another gallant knight. A thousand did Hagen choose, and willingly they came ; for little they knew the things that lay before them in the days that were to come.

In due time the Princes of Rhineland with their following set forth. A prosperous journey they had ; but the messengers of Etzel went before that they might more speedily carry the tidings to the King and to the Queen. Right glad was King Etzel to hear that his guests were coming, and Queen Kriemhild rejoiced yet more. “Tell me,” she said, “which of my kinsmen will come to the feast ; and, above all things, tell me what Hagen said.” “Not a good word had we from him from the beginning to the end,” answered the messengers ; “and when the journey hither was approved of the chiefs, he looked as though they spake of death. As for your kinsmen, your three brethren are coming, and Volker the minstrel.” “I could spare him,” said the Queen ; “but that Hagen is coming does indeed delight me.” And when the messengers had departed, she went to the King and said, “How does this please you,

my lord? As for me, the wish of my heart is fulfilled."

Meanwhile the company of the men of Rhineland journeyed to the country of the Huns, one thousand knights and nine thousand men at arms. Once more did the faithful Rumold warn them. "Why will ye leave your people and your land?" said he. "This message of Queen Kriemhild has always boded ill to my soul." "Peace," said King Gunther; "take thought for this realm which I trust to your care, and keep safe my little son, and if any man be in trouble, give him comfort. But as for us, King Etzel's wife will of surety do us no harm." For the kings would take no warning.

So they journeyed, Hagen being their guide, for he knew the way of old, and Sir Dankwart the marshal. On the twelfth morning the host came to the Danube, and lo! the river overflowed its bank, nor was there a ferry-boat to be seen. "See, King of Rhineland," said Sir Hagen, "how the river is in flood. We are in peril of losing many a brave warrior before nightfall." "Seek not to daunt us, Hagen," said King Gunther; "thou must find a ford whereby we may pass, we and our goods." Hagen answered, "My life is not yet such a burden that I would willingly be drowned in this raging river. I had sooner fall by the sword in King Etzel's land. Now do you

abide by the river, and I will seek ferrymen who shall carry us across the flood."

So Hagen took his shield, and he had a helmet on his head, and he carried a sword in his hand. For awhile he sought for a ferryman both up the river and down, but none could he find. Anon he heard the splash of water. 'Twas from a pool where two elfin women were bathing. "Now," said he to himself, "if I may lay hands upon these mermaids they shall tell me of the future, for they have the art to know it." So he crept craftily near them. Them indeed he caught not, but he laid hands on their clothing. Said one of them—Halburga was her name—"Now we will tell you, bold knight, how you will fare upon this journey, so that you give us our raiment again." And when he had so promised, she spake again, "Go on to the land of Etzel and prosper. Never did heroes take a journey by which they gat them more joy and honour." Much pleased was Hagen with this answer, and forthwith gave up the raiment. Then said the other mermaid—Siegelind was her name—"My sister spake falsely. If you go to Hunsland, surely you will rue it. Turn again, bold knight, while yet you may, for whosoever shall ride on this journey, shall ride with Death at his right hand." "You fool me to no purpose," said he; "why should we die in the land of the Huns?" "That," said the sisters

twain, "we know not ; but this we know, that of all who shall go to the land of the Huns one only shall return, even the King's chaplain." Then said Hagen, "This is an ill message to take to my masters. But tell me this : how can we cross this water?" The mermaid made answer, "If you will take no warning against this journey, know that there is but one ferryman, and that he dwells by yonder hostelry. But he is a churl, and will ferry no man across unless he judge him to be a good friend to Gelfrat, the lord of the land. If he come not quickly, say that your name is Amelrich."

So Hagen walked by the river's side till he came to the hostelry. Then he shouted across the river, "Come now, ferryman, and ferry me over, for time presses. You shall have an armlet of gold for your fee." And when there was no answer, he shouted again, "Come, ferryman, I am Amelrich." Thereupon the ferryman rowed the boat stoutly across the flood. But when he saw Hagen he said, "Whether Amelrich be your name I know not ; but this I know, that you are not the Amelrich I looked for, for he is my brother. Therefore, as you have deceived me, you may abide where you are." "This is ill said," answered Hagen. "I am a friend ; ferry me across in friendly fashion, and take this gold for your fee." "Not so," said the ferryman. "My lord has

many enemies, and I ferry no strangers to his land. Away from the boat, if you would live." "I will not away," quoth Hagen, "for I have a thousand men and more whom I would ferry over the flood." Then the ferryman smote at him with the oar; but missing, the stroke fell on his knee. And a second time he smote, this time with a steering-board, and the board brake into pieces on Hagen's head. But Hagen, dealing him but one blow with his sword, cut off his head. Meanwhile the boat was carried down the stream, and Hagen had much toil to bring it to land.

When this had at last been accomplished, King Gunther said, "Where is the boatman, Hagen?" and then, seeing the blood in the boat, "Methinks you have slain him." "Not I," said Hagen, for he feared to tell the truth. "I saw no boatman and have harmed none." "How shall we cross the flood, if there be no boatman?" asked Gernot. "Here am I," answered Hagen. "You will find no better rower on the Danube. I will bring you safe across to the land of the Margrave Gelfrat." And so he did. The horses they drave into the stream, and these swam across, but the men and all the baggage did the strong Hagen, toiling from morn to night, carry over.

When he had finished the task, he bethought him of the words which the mermaids had said and of their prophecy. "In this," said he to

himself, "they shall be false prophetesses." So he sought out the priest, as if to carry him across, and when they were now in mid-stream he cast him from the boat. Great was the wrath of Giselher and Gernot when they saw the deed. "What is this, Hagen?" they cried. "Had another done this deed you had been the first to blame." But Hagen heeded not, and when the priest came to the surface, thrust him under again. For all this, the man was not drowned—no, not though he could not swim. 'Twas the hand of God that helped him, for the stream carried him back to the shore from which Hagen had taken him. "They were true prophetesses," said Hagen to himself, when he saw the priest standing at the water's edge and shaking his garments.

When all the men and the goods had been ferried over, stout Hagen hewed the boat to pieces and cast the pieces into the flood. "What do you?" said Dankwart his brother to him. "How shall we cross to the Rhineland again when we ride homeward?" "I do it," said Hagen, "lest we should have brought any cowards with us, for the thoughts of a coward turn to going back."

CHAPTER XII

HOW THE RHINELANDERS CAME TO KING ETZEL

KING GUNTHER said to Hagen, "Now that we have crossed the river to this strange land, who shall be our guide?" "That will I," said Volker the minstrel. Then Hagen spake, "Sir King, I lied to you about the boatman. I slew him with my sword; nor will his masters take the matter easily. But let us ride quietly, nor seem like to men that flee for fear. And as for our guide, Volker shall he be, for he knows the way." So Volker wound a pennon of red upon his spear and rode on before the host.

When the day was ended they were aware of a great tramp of horse-hoofs, for the Margrave Gelfrat had heard of the slaying of the boatman, and had gathered a great number of knights, and was come out against the strangers. When they came near, Hagen cried, "Who is this that hunts us on the highway?" The Margrave made answer, "We seek our foemen. Some one has

slain my ferryman ; a skilful man was he, and I am sorely grieved at his death." "Was the boatman yours?" said Hagen. "If there has been wrong-doing it was mine. I slew him; else, in good truth, I had been slain myself. I offered him gold to ferry me across, and he smote me with a pole ; so I slew him. Nevertheless, I will make such amends as may be fitting." The Margrave answered, "Hagen is the cause of the mischief, and Hagen must die for it." Straightway the warriors fell to fighting ; Sir Gelfrat and Sir Hagen tilted at each other, and Hagen was cast to the ground. Soon he rose therefrom, and the two had at each other with swords. Then was Hagen sore bestead ; for Gelfrat parried all his blows, and he himself was well-nigh slain, for a great cantle was shorn off his shield, so that he cried to his brother, Sir Dankwart, "Now help me, brother, or this mighty man will make an end of me." Then Sir Dankwart sprang at the Margrave and laid him dead with a single blow. Then the Margrave's warriors fled, but they left a hundred men dead upon the field.

Hagen said, "Beware lest the Kings know of this mishap till the morning." So all that night they rode, and the Kings were not aware, for they were in the front of the march. But when the morning came, then Gunther was aware, and it displeased him much. "Little reck you,

Hagen," said he, "of my presence, that you stir up strife in this fashion. "The Margrave Gelfrat set upon us," he answered, "and we could not choose but fight for our lives."

And now the Rhinelanders were in no small need of rest and refreshment. And it chanced that Hagen, finding a knight, Eckewart by name, sleeping by the roadside, took away his sword. Loudly did the knight lament when he awoke, and Hagen gave back his sword and six armlets of gold beside. "Know by this token," said he, "that I am your friend." Then said the knight, "If you are Hagen, men love you not here, by reason of the slaying of Siegfried. Have a care, therefore." "'Tis God alone that can keep us," answered Hagen; "but now my care is how I may find refreshment for my comrades." "That is soon said," replied the knight; "the Margrave Rudeger dwells hard by, and will supply all your needs."

So the Rhinelanders rode on till they came to the castle of the Margrave Rudeger. The Margrave came forth to greet them, and with him were his wife Gotlinda and his daughter, a maiden as fair as any maiden ever was upon the earth.

The greetings being finished, the company sat down to meat, the knights by themselves and the ladies by themselves, as was the custom of the

land. Only, to do special honour to their guests, by the side of the Margrave sat Gotlinda his wife. But the daughter was not there, and many knights were sad therefor.

When the feast was over, said Volker the minstrel, "Were I a prince of royal blood and sought a wife, there is none whom I would rather choose, noble Margrave, than your fair daughter." The Margrave answered, "I am a stranger in the land; no king would seek my daughter for his wife, however fair she be." But Hagen said, "Not so, my lord; King Giselher seeks a wife, and should he wed your daughter, all we his liegemen in the Rhineland would gladly welcome her." And so it was ordered. King Gunther and Gernot his brother assured to the maiden castles and land. And Rudeger said, "Castles have I none, but I will give my daughter so much silver and gold as a hundred horses may carry." Then the two gave their promise the one to the other, and so were betrothed. "When ye come again on your journey homeward," said the Margrave, "then will I give my daughter to Giselher." And all were glad, but they knew not that which was to be.

On the fourth morning the Rhinelanders departed, and the Margrave gave them many gifts, to Gunther a coat of mail, and to Gernot a

sword—an ill gift, as fate would have it—and to others other things. Then said Gotlinda to Hagen, “What will you have in token of my goodwill?” And Hagen spied a shield that hung upon the wall. “Give me that,” said he. Now the shield had been worn by Nudung, her brother, and when she heard the words of Hagen she wept, remembering how he had been slain. Nevertheless, she did not deny the gift. “Take it,” said she, “but would to God he were alive this day to bear it.” And to the minstrel she gave twelve armlets of gold.

So the Rhinelanders departed with great joy, and came to the stronghold of King Etzel. Right glad was Kriemhild to see them, as she stood at her window and watched the road.

The first that came forth to meet the newcomers was that stout hero, Dietrich of Verona, with his company of noble Goths. “Now welcome, King Gunther,” said he, “and welcome all ye knights. But know you not that Kriemhild still mourns for her husband?” “Let her mourn, if she will,” answered Hagen; “’tis her duty to love the King of Hunsland, and let Siegfried be. ’Tis long since he was buried, and he will scarce return.” “Guard yourself well, bold knight,” said Dietrich, “for surely you will have need.” Then they drew the stout Dietrich aside, and asked him privately what he knew concerning

the Queen and her moods. "Only this I know," said he, "that, though she is King Etzel's wedded wife, I hear her every morning weeping and wailing for Siegfried." When Hagen heard it, he said to Volker the minstrel, "Volker, this is our doom, and we may not in anywise avoid it."

So the Rhinelanders rode on to the King's court. Many there were that watched them. But none was so much observed of all beholders as was Hagen of Tronje, for all men knew that he had done Siegfried to death. Goodly of growth was he and of a noble presence. There were streaks of gray in his hair, and his face was as though it had been wrought of stone.

Then came forth Queen Kriemhild to greet her kinsfolk. Giseller she kissed, taking his hand, but to all beside her courtesy was cold. When Hagen saw it, he said, "Such greeting may well make a warrior doubt. We have made no lucky journey, I trow." "What greeting did you look for from me?" said the Queen. "What bring you for me from the Rhineland?" "Had I thought you looked for gifts," he answered, "even then I had thought twice before I brought them." "I look not but for my own," said she. "What have you done with the Nibelung treasure? That was my own, as well you know, and you should have brought it with you to King Etzel's land." "My lady Kriemhild," answered

he, "the treasure has long since been sunk in the Rhine, and there, I trow, will it abide until the Judgment Day." Then said the Queen, "I looked for so much; I knew that you would bring little with you." "And with good reason, fair lady; I have my shield to carry, and that, with my coat of mail, is burden enough; there is the sword also in my hand, and the helmet on my head." Then the Queen cried aloud, "Let no man carry weapon into the hall. Give your arms to me, fair sirs, and I will keep them safe." But Hagen answered, "'Tis too great an honour, fair Queen, that you should take my arms. My father taught me better courtesy. I will be my own armour-bearer." Then Kriemhild spake aloud, "They are afraid; some one has warned them. Knew I who it is, he should have death for his recompense." "'Twas I," said the Lord Dietrich, "that warned them. Harm me if you dare, she-fiend that you are." And Kriemhild went away speechless, for she feared to strive with the stout Dietrich.

Then Dietrich and Hagen clasped hands. "I am grieved that you are come among the Huns-folk," said Dietrich, "seeing what words the Queen has spoken to you. "It matters not," answered the bold Hagen. "I can defend myself."

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE BEGINNING OF STRIFE

WHEN Dietrich had gone, Hagen called Volker the Minstrel to him, and prayed that he should bear him company. So the two sat together on a settle by the palace wall. There Kriemhild saw them, and the sight vexed her. When her knights saw her weeping they asked who had troubled her. "Hagen has troubled me," said she, "and I would serve for ever the man who should avenge me on him." Then sixty bold warriors girded on their armour. But the Queen, when she saw them, said, "You are too few, for Hagen is a mighty man, and the minstrel is yet mightier than he." Then four hundred armed themselves. To them she said, "Wait awhile ; I will put on my crown, and so go to my enemies, and do you hearken to what I shall say."

When Volker saw her, he said, "Here comes the woman who has lured us into this land, and there is a great company of warriors with her,

Clad they are in silk, but I trow that they have their coats of mail beneath." "I know what they purpose," answered the bold Hagen, "but for all that I hope to see the Rhineland again. But say, will you help me?" "That will I with all my heart," said the bold minstrel; "not a foot's breadth will I yield for all the King's warriors. But let us rise from our seats, for she is a King's daughter." "I entreat you," said Hagen, "for the love of me, do it not. Why should I do honour to a woman that hates me?" So he sat in his place, and across his knees he laid the good sword Balmung that had been Siegfried's, that he might raise her wrath the more; and on his knees Volker laid his fiddle-bow. Then said the Queen, "Hagen, who bade you come hither? You had been better advised to tarry at home." "No one bade me," said he, "but you called my masters, and I could not tarry behind." "Say," she said, "why did you slay Siegfried my husband?" "For Brunhild's sake I slew him. Nor do I deny, great Queen, that I am the cause of your sorrows. Avenge them if you will and if you can." Then Kriemhild turned to her knights and said, "Hear what he confesses. Let him suffer for his misdeeds." But the knights hung back. Said one, "Why should I go to my death for King Etzel's wife?" and another, "I would give a tower of gold rather than meet that min-

strel in battle"; and another yet, "I know what a warrior Hagen is, and how he has the good sword Balmung in his hand." So they went, one this way, and another that, and Kriemhild was stricken to the heart to see how her champions failed her. "Now let us go and seek the King," said Volker the Minstrel, "for here, 'tis plain to see, we have no friends." But King Etzel knew nothing of the evil purposes of the Queen. With all his heart he greeted his guests. And the salutations being ended, he took them to the banqueting hall, and feasted them to their hearts' content.

But when the feast was over and the guests were taken to the hall where they were to sleep, little peace had they or desire for rest, for all that there was bounteous provision made of goodly mats, and blankets of divers hues and coverlets of ermine and sable. "I fear me much," said Giselher, "for all that my sister has bidden us so hospitably, that this journey will end in our destruction." "Trouble not yourself now," said Hagen, "for I will keep watch till daybreak. So long shall you lie in peace; after that let each man take care for himself." Thereupon they went all of them to their beds and laid them down in peace. But Hagen donned his armour. Then said Volker the Minstrel, "If thou disdain not my company, I will keep guard with you till



HAGEN AND VOLKER IN THE PRESENCE OF KRIEMHILD.

daybreak." "God in heaven reward you, true comrade," cried Hagen. "I will repay you one day, unless death prevent." Then these two, clad in shining armour, took their stand by the castle gateway to keep watch over their sleeping friends. But Volker the Minstrel played sweet music till all were lapt in sleep.

When the night was half-spent, Volker saw the gleam of a helmet far off in the darkness. "Hagen," said he, "I see some folk in armour. They purpose, I doubt not, to set upon us." "Hold your peace," said Hagen, "and let them come nearer. We will split their helmets for them, and send them back to Kriemhild ill content." Meanwhile one of the Huns had espied that the doorway was guarded. "They have watchmen at the gate," said he, and turned away. "Now, Hagen, let us follow them," cried the minstrel; "I would fain know who these lieges of Kriemhild are." "Not so," answered Hagen; "if you go then shall I be called to help, and when we two are busy in the fray what shall hinder the others from falling on our comrades in their sleep?" Then Volker shouted aloud, "If ye are minded to go on a foray, fair warriors, suffer us to ride with you." But the Queen was greatly troubled when she knew that she had failed a second time.

Soon after these things said Volker the Min-

strel, "Methinks the day is near, so cold do I feel my armour," and the light began to break on the sleepers in the hall. Soon, too, the minster bells began to chime for mass. "Rouse you," said Hagen to the knights; and when they were for donning silken doublets and the garments of peace, "Not so," he cried, "take now not jewelled caps, but helmets; not silk attire but hauberks of steel, and bucklers for mantles, for be sure that you will need them to-day. And come to the minster that you may pray to Almighty God in your need, for death is near at hand. And if a man has aught on his soul, let him confess it, for, save of special grace, you will not hear another mass." And when they were come into the minster he said again, "Set your bucklers, my friends, upright before you, and if any speak to you unfriendly words, answer him not with speech, but with as strong a sword-stroke as you may."

When Etzel saw them thus arrayed, he said, "Why go my friends with helmet on head and shield on arm? Is it not peace?" And Hagen made answer, "'Tis our Rhineland custom so to go to all assemblies in a strange land till three days are past." This Kriemhild heard, and knowing that there was no such custom in Rhineland, held her peace, lest the King should discern her purpose. There was a great company of

Huns with King Etzel and his Queen, and they looked askance at the strangers, but there was no strife, only pushing and hustling where the press was great, and there was lack of courtesy.

After this the lists were set for a tournament. First came into the lists six hundred knights who followed Dietrich of Verona. Full fain were they to run a course with the Rhinelanders, but Dietrich would not suffer it, thinking that of such a sport nothing but loss could come.

After these there came the men of the Margrave Rudeger. These also their chief held back. "These Rhinelanders," said he, "are in an angry mood. You had better leave them alone."

After these again came the men of Thuringen and of Denmark. And now the jousting began, and many a lance was broken, and the splinters flew about the lists. And Kriemhild said to herself as she looked, "Now if by chance one of the knights be hurt, then will this sport be turned to earnest, and I shall have my revenge." But still there was nought but sound, nor did any suffer harm. Then said Volker the Minstrel, "They dare not meet us; yet, forsooth, if they hate us indeed, what were a better time to show it? Come, let us stable our horses; haply, when evening comes, we may run another course."

But as he spoke there rode into the lists a Hunnish knight, clad in gayest attire, as a bride

might be clad. Then Volker the Minstrel said to his comrades, "Yonder darling of the ladies shall feel my spear, aye, though it anger the Queen." But King Gunther cried, "Volker, as you love me, forbear. If there must be strife, let the Huns begin it." But the minstrel heeded not. Straight rode he at the Hun, and pierced him with his spear, so that he fell dead to the ground. And after Volker came Hagen riding with sixty knights, nor would Gunther and his brethren sit still for all that they were lovers of peace.

Then there arose a mighty tumult in the lists, for the kinsmen of the dead man cried out against his slayer, and all the Huns were eager to avenge him. But King Etzel would not suffer that there should be strife. He caught a weapon from one that stood by him, and drave the people back. "Harm not the strangers," he cried with a loud voice, "nor shame me in my own land by want of courtesy. Had you slain the minstrel it had been a grievous wrong, for I saw with my own eyes what he did; 'twas not by fault of his, but my mischance that he slew the knight." So the strife was stayed again, but there was little love between the Huns and the men from Rhineland.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW BLOEDELIN AND MANY MORE WERE SLAIN

QUEEN KRIEMHILD sought counsel of her friends. And first she said to Dietrich, "Will you not help me, sir, for I am in evil case?" Then Hildebrand, whom Dietrich trusted above other men, answered her, "Lady, whosoever would slay the Rhinelanders shall get no help from me; no treasure shall tempt me to such deeds." And Dietrich said, "Change your purpose, noble lady. It ill becomes you to plot your kinsfolk's death. And as for me, these men have done me no wrong, and I will not raise my hand against them."

Then the Queen spake to Bloedelin, who was brother to King Etzel. "Surely you will aid me, Sir Bloedelin? Here in the palace are the men who slew my dear husband, Siegfried. To him who shall avenge me I shall be beholden for ever. And I will give him straightway the wide marshland which Nudung held in time past." "Lady," answered Sir Bloedelin, "I fear King Etzel.

Did I harm your kinsmen, I should never have his forgiveness." "Say not so," said the Queen, "I will be your friend; from me you shall have gold and silver, aye, and as fair a bride as ever was seen in the land, she that was betrothed to Nudung. Her shall you have to wife, and lands and castles with her, all the fair earldom that Nudung held." This thing pleased Bloedelin well, for in truth he loved the damsel. "It shall be done," said he. "I will make an uproar in the hall, and you shall have your enemy brought to you in bonds." Thereupon he said to his liegemen, "Now rouse yourselves; we will fall on these strangers in the hall." So his warriors made themselves ready for battle, and marched to the hall, where Sir Dankwart and his men sat at meat. "You are welcome, Sir Bloedelin," said Dankwart, "though, indeed, I marvel at your coming." "Greet me no greetings," said the Prince, "my coming is not for peace. Did not you and your brother slay Siegfried? For that deed you and your fellows must answer." "Nay, Lord Bloedelin," answered Sir Dankwart, "I was but a stripling when Siegfried was slain. I know not what the Lady Kriemhild has against me." Bloedelin answered, "I know no more of the matter than that your kinsmen did the deed, and that they and you must pay to the Queen the penalty therefor." Then Dankwart cried in his

wrath, "Will nothing turn you? Would that I had not answered soft words." So saying he sprang up from his seat, and drawing his sword, smote Bloedelin with a stroke so strong and swift that he shore off his head. "Be that thy marriage gift," he said, "to Nudung's bride. Her they may betroth to-morrow to another, and he, if he will, may win for himself a like gift." For a Hun that was ill pleased with treachery had told to Sir Dankwart how the Queen was plotting against him.

When the Prince's liegemen saw him lying dead before them, they sprang in a great rage upon the Rhinelanders. And Dankwart cried, "See, my comrades, how ye are like to fare in this place. This is the Queen Kriemhild's hospitality." Then they drew their swords, and they to whom swords were wanting caught up the long stools from beneath their feet. Right valiantly with them did they assail the foe, and drave them headlong from the hall. But many were the dead whom they left behind.

But now the Hunnish warriors donned their armour, and fell upon Sir Dankwart's men. Bravely did these defend themselves, but nothing could save them from slaughter. And with them fell twelve knights of Sir Dankwart's own command. Then Sir Dankwart said, "Woe is me for my comrades that are fallen! Now must I

stand alone." Many and sore were the strokes that the Huns showered upon him, but he bare them all, and still pressed forward to the gate of the hall. "Make way," he cried, "ye Huns, and let me breathe air, for I am hot with the battle." So he won his way to the gate. And still new foes gathered about him, till he cried, "Now would I could send a messenger to Hagen my brother, to tell him in what sore straits I am. Surely he would stand by my side, or lie dead beside me." "You shall be your own messenger," answered the Huns, "when we cast down your dead body before your brother's face." "Now cease your threatenings," cried the Rhineland warrior; "I will tell my story to King Etzel and my own masters." And he still bore on through the press. No man in all the Hunnish host dared meet him sword to sword; but they drave their lances into his shield till he was fain to drop it for its weight. And now, when he lacked his shield, the foemen thought to slay him, but he still bare up against them. Many had cause to rue that they came against him. He stood as a wild boar stands at bay and rends the hounds. And now he had won his way within the hall where Hagen and the Rhineland lords sat at meat. "Bestir you, brother Hagen!" he cried, "you sit too long. In our hostel yeomen and knights full many lie dead together." "And who

has done this thing?" said Hagen. "Prince Bloedelin," answered Sir Dankwart, "and has paid the penalty, for I smote off his head with my good sword." "But tell me," said Hagen, "who has wounded you?" "No one," answered he; "this blood that you see is the blood of others." Then Hagen cried, "Brother Dankwart, keep the door, for none of these Huns shall go through."

Now Kriemhild had brought her son to the table where she sat with her lord, King Etzel. And Hagen said, "We have heard long time of Queen Kriemhild's sorrow. Let us drink to her darling." And he smote off the child's head with his sword. The next blow he dealt to the tutor that had the boy in charge. It was sorry pay for the teacher. And with a third he lopped off the minstrel's hand that had come in days past as a messenger to the Rhineland. Then the three brother kings, seeing that there could now be no thought of peace, joined the battle. Right valiantly did they fight, and King Etzel's men also stood up valiantly against them. And still Sir Dankwart held the door, with Volker the Minstrel for his comrade. Dankwart stood without and Volker stood within.

Queen Kriemhild said to the Lord Dietrich, "Now save me from my enemies. If Hagen come at me, I die." Dietrich made answer,

"Great Queen, how can I save you ; I shall have enough to save myself, for these Rhineland knights are mighty men of valour. Yet you shall have all the help I can give." Then he shouted aloud. There was no man on earth that could shout so loud as he. And King Gunther heard it where he sat, and he said to his knights, "Hear now ; that is Lord Dietrich's voice. I trow that some of his people have been slain by us." And he rose from his place and looked, and said, "I see him stand on the table, and he beckons with his hand." Then the King cried aloud, "Cease fighting now, friends and kinsmen, till I hear what complaint the Lord Dietrich has against me." And when he had so spoken, all held their hands, for they would not disobey the King. Then said Gunther, "Has any one of my people wronged you, noble Dietrich ? I will give you due amends if such a thing has been." "No wrong has been done me," Dietrich made answer. "Only give me and mine safe conduct that we may leave this place of death." "You shall have it," said the King, "but these Huns shall stay, every one." Then Dietrich took King Etzel with him on one arm, and the Queen Kriemhild on the other, and passed from out the hall, and his six hundred warriors followed him.

Then said the Margrave Rudeger, "If you

suffer any to pass out of this hall, suffer us also, for we are true friends to you!"

Giselher made answer, "It shall be as you wish, for you and your lieges are faithful men. So the Margrave Rudeger departed, and five hundred men went with him.

But of the Huns that were in the hall not one went forth alive. When the slaughter was ended, Giselher said: "Now must we cast out the dead from the place; it will hinder us if they lie here under our feet, for that our foes will make yet another onset I know full well. But they shall not slay us before we have given them many another wound." "This is good counsel," said Hagen. "You may well be proud of your young master, men of the Rhineland." Then the warriors did as he bade them and cast forth the dead, aye and some that were not so sorely wounded but that they might have lived with gentler handling; but how could a man live, being cast from so great a height? Great was the wailing among the Huns to see so many of their kinsfolk dead. Then said Volker the Minstrel, "Now I see that it was told me true that these Huns are but cowards, for they wail as women, when they might bind their comrades' wounds" This a certain noble heard, and thinking that twas spoken in good faith, took up a wounded kinsman in his arms and would have

dragged him thence; but the minstrel slew him with a lance. And all the multitude, when they saw it, cursed aloud; but the minstrel, taking up a javelin that some Hun had cast at him, hurled it over their heads. "Stand further," he cried, "where you may be beyond my casting."

Anon, Sir Hagen cried scoffingly to King Etzel, where he stood among the crowd, "Surely the nobles should be foremost in the battle, if they would give the people courage. Such is the wont of our Rhineland chiefs." Then the King gripped his shield, but Queen Kriemhild held him back. And Hagen cried, "'Tis a strange bond between Siegfried and King Etzel, this love of the fair Kriemhild." Then cried the Queen, "To him who will bring me the head of Hagen I will give Etzel's shield filled high with gold, and lands and goodly towns." "Now see," said the minstrel, "how sluggishly they hold them back, even when the Queen offers them so goodly a reward!"

Then said Iring, a margrave of Denmark, "Bring me now my arms; alone I will challenge this Hagen." "Come, if you will," cried Hagen, "you and your fellows; we will send you back." So Iring donned his arms, and with him Irnfried, and the stout Haward, and many others. "See," said Volker the Minstrel, "he would challenge us as alone, but he has a host

with him. It ill becomes a knight to lie." Then Iring said, "No man shall call me a liar; stand back, kinsmen and comrades; I will meet this Hagen alone." So they stood back, sorely against their will, and Iring, holding his shield before him, ran up the steps. Hagen and he laid many blows on each other, first with spear, and then with broadsword, but neither could prevail. Then Iring turned him to Volker the Minstrel, and from Volker to King Gunther, and from the King to Gernot. To each he dealt blow upon blow, and when he could not prevail against them he turned again and slew four other of the Rhineland knights. This Giselher saw with great anger, and cried, "You shall pay me for these dead men, Sir Iring," and dealt him a blow so heavy that he fell down before him without speech or sense. All thought him dead, nor did he himself know that he lived. But when he came to himself he said, "I have no wound; but this Giselher is a strong knight." Then he sprang to his feet and rushed at Hagen, and smote him again with all his strength, and brake through the helmet and wounded him, so stout a blade had he, the good sword Haske; then, raising his shield above his head, fled down the stairs, and got safe back to his own people.

Right glad was Kriemhild to see how he had prospered, and took his shield from him, saying:

“A pleasant sight it is to see the red blood on Hagen’s raiment.” “That is but a small matter,” cried Hagen ; “let him come again.”

Now when Iring heard men praising him on every side, he grew very bold in mood. “Arm me quickly,” he said, for he had doffed his armour for refreshment sake ; “I will try yet another venture with that haughty knight.” So his men armed him again, and gave him a new shield, for that which he had borne was hacked to pieces. But Hagen waited not for his coming, but ran at him and met him at the stairs’ foot, and smote him with a great stroke through his armour. And when he would have fallen back, taking a spear that lay upon the ground, cast it so strongly that it pierced through the helmet to the brain. Scarcely could Iring win back to his comrades, and when they took the helmet from his head and drew forth the spear he was at the point to die. Bitterly did Kriemhild weep when she saw it ; but the chief said, “Cease your weeping, noble lady, for it avails nothing ; my life is ended ; no more can I serve the King or you.”

Then Haward and Irnfried sprang forward to avenge their chief, but to no purpose, for Volker the Minstrel laid Irnfried low, and Hagen slew Haward. Nor could their followers prevail against the Rhineland champions ; not a man that came into the hall left it alive, so sturdily

did King Gunther and his men defend themselves.

After this the strife was stayed for awhile, and the men of Rhineland laid aside their helmets and shields and rested. But Volker the Minstrel ever kept guard at the door.

CHAPTER XV

HOW THE HALL WAS SET ON FIRE

THE next day was the battle joined again. From morning to night they fought, the Huns and the men of Rhineland; 'twas summer time and the days were long.

At sunset, King Gunther and his brother, and their comrades, came forth from the hall and talked with King Etzel, if perchance they could agree on conditions of peace. Said the King, "What would you have? A truce? But bethink what evil you have wrought, how you have slain my child and many of my kin. There can be no peace for you." Then King Gunther answered, "We did all that we have done under constraint. We came in good faith, thinking that you were our friend, and lo! this is the end." And Giseller said, "How have I wronged you? I came hither in kindness." "Aye," answered the chiefs of Hunland, "your kindness has filled every city in our land with woe." And King

Etzel said, "Surely not one of you shall depart hence with his life." Then said Gernot, "If this must be so, then let us come out into the open field, and slay and be slain." This the King and his men were minded to grant. But Kriemhild would not suffer it. "Let not these men come from out the hall. You will rue it sorely if you do. Though there were but two or three brothers left of the Rhineland men, they would work you grievous loss, for they are valiant knights." Then Giselher said, "Fair sister, I did ill to trust you, and come at your bidding into the land of the Huns. Tell me now what I have done to be so dealt with by you. To you I have been faithful ever." Said she, "I cannot show you mercy, such misery has Hagen wrought me. Yet, if you will give me Hagen for a hostage, maybe I can let you live, because you are sons of my mother." "Now God forbid," cried Gernot, "that we should do this thing, to yield any man a hostage. We would sooner die, though there were a thousand of us, not three." "Aye," said Giselher, "we will die, if die we must; but we have yet our arms." And Dankwart said, "You may rue it yet that you will not give us a truce." Then said Queen Kriemhild, "Now suffer no man to leave the hall, and set fire to it at the four corners. So shall I be avenged of my wrongs." So her men set fire to the hall at the

four corners, and in a short space, for the wind blew strongly, the flames spread over it from top to bottom. Sore distressed were the Rhinelanders, yet they endured, and when the sparks fell upon them they caught them on their shields, and so turned them to the ground and trampled them out in the blood. So the night was spent and the morning came. And still, for all the violence of the fire, the heroes were yet alive.

Then the battle was again joined, and Queen Kriemhild bade bring gold for gifts to her warriors. On shields they brought it, piled high, and she gave to all that asked. Well did the Hunnish warriors fight for their wages, but for all that the men of Rhineland still held their place.

On the morrow came the Margrave Rudeger. He wept to see the sight, so grievous was it. "Woe is me," said he, "that I have lived to see this day! Gladly would I make peace between these two, but I doubt that King Etzel will not have it." Nevertheless, he sent a messenger to the Lord Dietrich, saying, "Can we turn King Etzel's heart to peace?" But the Lord Dietrich answered him, "It may not be. The King is set against it."

A certain Hun saw how Rudeger wept, and he said to the Queen, "Now see this man who has received much from the hands of the King, and yet has struck never a blow in this quarrel!

Little cares he, if things go according to his will.' Then Rudeger answered. "Think you," he said to the Hun, "that I am afraid? You had better not say such words aloud." And he smote him a great blow with his fist, and laid him dead. "I have borne enough, villain," said he, "without ill words from you."

Then said the Margrave to the King, "I led these men into this land, and therefore I cannot raise my hand against them." The King answered, "This is help indeed, noble Rudeger; we had dead enough already, and you slay yet another." "He made me wroth with his lies," said Rudeger. Then spake the Queen, "You pledged me your word that you would help me in my need, and never had I such need as now." "You speak truth, fair lady," answered the noble Rudeger. "I promised that I would risk life and fame for you, but I promised not that I would risk my soul." But the Queen was urgent with him. "Forget not," she said, "your loyalty and your oath that you would avenge me of my wrongs." So said also King Etzel. On their knees they fell before the Margrave, and prayed him to help them. Then said the noble Rudeger, in great sorrow, "God pity me that I have lived to see this day! For whether I do this thing, or whether I forbear, I shall have done grievous wrong." And when the King and the Queen

were urgent with him, he said, "Take back, my lord, all that you have given me; I will go into exile a landless man." But Etzel answered, "Who then will help me? Avenge me now of these mine enemies, and I will set you next to myself." Rudeger answered, "I took these Rhinelanders into my castle, and gave them meat and drink, and I brought them hither. Also I promised my daughter to Giselher. How then can I work them harm?" But Kriemhild said, "Have you no pity for us and our trouble that we have such evil guests?" Then Rudeger answered, "Now, I know, must I pay with my life for the kindness that you have shown me? Only have a care, I beseech you, for my wife and my child, and for the helpless folk over whom I rule." "Now God defend you and bring you safe," said Kriemhild, and she wept.

So Rudeger donned his arms, and bade his warriors make them ready for battle.

When Giselher saw them coming, he was glad, for he deemed, as was fitting, that they came in friendship. "Here be welcome friends," he cried; "surely good luck has come of my betrothing." "These are strange friends," said Volker the Minstrel, "that come in this fashion." Then Rudeger set his shield before his feet, and cried aloud, "Be on your guard, men of the Rhineland; once we were friends, but now I renounce your

friendship.' Sore troubled were they to hear such words, for they had foes enough already. King Gunther said, "Surely you are on our side, noble Rudeger." "Fain would I so have been," he answered, "but Queen Kriemhild constrains me. 'Tis sorely against my will that I do this thing. Would to God that ye were safe back in the Rhineland, and I in my grave!"

Then he and his comrades raised their bucklers, as if they would have made their way into the hall, but Hagen cried, "Hold awhile, noble Rudeger, the buckler that the Lady Gotlinda gave me has been hacked by these Hunnish warriors out of all shape. Now give me another that I may bear it in the battle." "So shall it be," answered the noble Rudeger, and gave him a buckler stout and broad. All that saw it wept for pity to see what a generous soul the Margrave had. "I at least will not harm you," said Hagen, and Volker the Minstrel spake saying, "Hagen my comrade has made a truce with you, and even so will I. And now, Sir Margrave, your wife gave me these armlets of red gold that I might wear them at the feast. See now and tell her how I have obeyed her command." And Rudeger answered, "I will tell her, if only I return." No more he said, but rushed against the Rhinelanders, and his liegemen followed him. Never was fought a fiercer battle than in the hall that day, and

many a warrior fell on either side. Only Hagen and Volker crossed not swords with the Margrave; Giseller turned aside from him, lest he should slay the father of his bride. At the last there came together these two, Rudeger and Gernot, and first Rudeger smote Gernot a mighty blow and shore his helmet in twain, so that the red blood flowed amain. Then, again, Gernot in his turn struck a great blow with his sword—Rudeger's own gift it was, and now it brought his life to an end. So these two fell down dead together in the hall.

Great was the lamentation that his brethren and Volker and Hagen and the other knights of Rhineland made over Gernot. And King Etzel and Queen Kriemhild mourned sore, on the other hand, when they knew that Rudeger was dead.

CHAPTER XVI

THE END

So loud was the wailing that the lieges of Lord Dietrich heard it. And one of them said to his lord, "Now there has befallen some grievous harm to King Etzel or the Queen." So Dietrich sent one who should learn the cause of this great wailing. And one of King Etzel's men answered, "The noble Rudeger is dead, and of all that followed him into the hall there has come out alive not one." Said the Lord Dietrich, "This is ill hearing, indeed; how could such things befall Rudeger, for he loved these strangers well?' Then bade he Hildebrand, an aged warrior, who was his chosen councillor, to discover the truth. So the old man donned his armour, and when he turned, lo! all Lord Dietrich's warriors were standing in battle array. "Whither go ye?" he asked. "We go with you," said they; "for if we bear you company Hagen, we trow, will not be so ready to answer you with mocking speech."

When Volker saw them, girt with their swords and holding their shields before them, he said "Here is fresh trouble for us." Then said Hildebrand, "What harm, my friends, did the noble Rudeger to you that you have slain him, if indeed this thing be true?" "True it is," answered Hagen, "and as grievous a thing as could have befallen." When they heard these words there was not one of the Lord Dietrich's liegemen but wept. "Never was a kinder host," said one; and another, "I had not sorrowed more had I seen my own father lie dead before me this day;" and yet a third, "Who will lead us as Rudeger led us in the old days?"

When they came to the hall, old Hildebrand said, "Give us now the dead body of Rudeger that we may pay him such honour as is due from friend to friend, for he has done us much service in time past, and we would fain requite him." "Ye do right to do him honour in such fashion," said Gunther the King. "Why then do you delay?" said Wolfhart. "Give us his body that we may lay him in his grave." "Nay," said Volker the Minstrel, "we give him not. Come and take him where he lies, and so requite him to the full." Wolfhart answered, "You have done us wrong enough in slaying him, Sir Minstrel. Add not thereto your taunts, for our master has forbidden us to fight."

‘Methinks,” said the minstrel, “’tis fear that makes a man to obey when his master lays such commands upon him.” Then Wolfhart cried in great anger, “I will soon untune your fiddle, and send you homeward to the Rhine with your pride abated,” and he would have sprung upon him but that the old Hildebrand held him back. “Now let go the liar,” cried the minstrel; “let him come where I may slay him.”

Then Hildebrand, for all his wisdom, and Wolfhart, and all the warriors of the Lord Dietrich, rushed at the Rhinelanders. Again was there a fierce battle. After many blows given and received, Volker slew Siegstall that was sister’s son to Dietrich. And when old Hildebrand saw his lord’s nephew lie dead, he was moved to such wrath as he had never felt before, and smote the minstrel through helm and buckler, so that he fell dead upon the ground. Dankwart fell that day by the hand of Helfrich, and Wolfhart and Giselher were slain together each by the hand of the other.

When old Hildebrand saw his sister’s son lie ready to die, he would fain have raised him from the ground; but his strength failed him, and he was constrained to let him lie. But before he died, Wolfhart said, “Now take heed to yourself and beware of Hagen. Let my kinsfolk weep for me, for I have fallen with honour, done to

death by the hand of a king, and have slain myself a goodly number of my foes."

And now Hagen espied the old man where he stood, and lifting the good sword Balmung, which Siegfried had carried in time past, he smote with a mighty blow. Grievous was the wound, but not so deep but that Hildebrand fled from the hall and came to where the Lord Dietrich sat. When Dietrich saw him, all covered with blood as he was, he said, "What ails you, Master Hildebrand? Whence comes this blood? You have been fighting, I doubt not, with these strangers in this palace, though this I strictly forbade." To him Hildebrand made answer, "'Twas Hagen gave me this wound; barely did I escape from him with life." Lord Dietrich answered, "You had but your deserts; why did you break the pledge of peace which I gave to the men of the Rhineland?" "Be not angry, my lord," said the old man, "we did but go into the hall to fetch the body of the noble Rudeger, for King Gunther's liegemen would not give it to us." "Is noble Rudeger then dead?" said Dietrich; "this is the most grievous tidings that ever were told me. Now say, Hildebrand, who was he that slew the noble Margrave?" "'Twas Gernot slew him," Hildebrand made answer, 'and he himself is dead, slain by the hand of Rudeger.' When he heard these things, Dietrich

said, "Now tell my lieges that they must arm themselves forthwith. I will hear this tale from the men of Rhineland with my own ears." The old man made answer, "Lieges have you none, my lord, save him that speaks with you. They are all slain." "What!" cried the hero, "all my liegemen slain; then indeed am I forsaken of God! But tell me, who of the strangers are left alive?" "Two only," answered the old man Hildebrand, "Hagen and King Gunther."

Then Dietrich clad himself in his armour, Master Hildebrand helping him, and took his way to the hall. Hagen saw him coming and said, "Here comes the Lord Dietrich. He thinks that there is no man his equal upon earth, and he will seek to call us to a reckoning. Yet for all that I do not fear to stand before him." When Dietrich was come to the hall, he said, "Why have you thus dealt with me? Was it not enough to slay the noble Rudeger, but you must rob me of the whole company of my liegemen? In truth I had never so done to you." "We are not guilty in this matter," answered Hagen; "your men came marching in a great army, well-armed, and, as it was manifest, with hostile purpose." "Is it not the truth," said Dietrich, "that you would not give my men the body of Rudeger from out of the hall, but answered them with gibes?" "The body,"

answered Gunther, "I would not give. But this I did in despite of King Etzel, not to do a displeasure to your men. Then Wolfhart spoke discourteous words, and this was the beginning of strife." Then Dietrich said, "So be it. But now I demand this atonement, that you and Hagen yield yourselves as hostages. I will guard you against all harm that the Hunfolk may do, nor shall you have from me aught but goodwill." "Now God forbid," cried Hagen, "that two stout warriors should yield themselves up to their enemies!" "Beware, King Gunther and Sir Hagen," said Dietrich, "how you refuse this thing I have offered. You cannot make easier amends, for I hereby pledge and promise that I will ride myself with you to your own land, and suffer none to do you wrong." "'Tis enough," answered Hagen; "'twere no fitting story to be told of us that we gave ourselves up unharmed." "Think again, brave warriors," said Hildebrand. "Nay," answered Hagen, "you who fled but lately from me, keep your counsel for yourself." "Enough of this wrangling," said Dietrich; "and now, Hagen, are you ready to stand against me in battle?" "Yes, verily," said he, "and if my good sword Balmung fail me not, will give you a stroke worth heeding."

So these two joined in battle, the Lord Dietrich and Sir Hagen. Well did Dietrich know Sir

Hagen's might, and well he knew what a good sword he had, and he guarded himself with all his skill. But now, for the Lord Dietrich was a great warrior, and Hagen was sorely spent, the lord of Verona mastered the hero of Rhineland. Slay him he would not, but he clasped him closely in his hand and bound him, and carried him to where the Queen Kriemhild stood. Great joy had the Queen, and felt that now she had recompense for all her sorrows. Low did she bend her to the Lord Dietrich, saying, "Blessings be upon you, soul and body. For this service I am your debtor for ever." "Spare his life," said Dietrich, "most noble Queen, and he will yet make you amends."

Then the Queen bade them carry away Hagen to a dungeon, where he might be unseen of all.

Meanwhile King Gunther abode alone in the hall, loudly complaining that Dietrich had left him. But when the chief of Verona came back, then was fought another great fight. King Gunther bore himself as a king, but he could not prevail against Dietrich. He also was overcome, and bound and carried to the Queen. And again Dietrich said, "You must spare his life, noble Queen. For my sake let them live." And the Queen promised that so she would do. But in her heart she was bent on their death.

In two dungeons far apart did the Queen

bestow them. And first she went to Hagen. "Give that which is mine, and which you took from me, and you yet may travel home alive," she said. He answered, "Noble Queen, you are wasting your words. So long as one of my masters lives, I will not show the treasure, nor yield it to any one." "That is soon ended," said she.

So she bade her liegemen slay her brother in his prison. So they slew him, and struck off his head. And this the Queen took by the hair, and bore it to Hagen where he lay in the prison. When he saw his master's head he said, "Now that King Gunther is dead, and Gernot also is no more, and Giseller also, no one knows of the treasure, save me and God alone. But unto you, she-devil, it never shall be known." "Say you so?" cried she; "but, at the least, I have Siegfried's sword, which I saw him bear ere you foully did him to death." And she drew the sword from the scabbard, and swung it with both her hands and smote off the warrior's head.

"That is ill done," said King Etzel, when he saw it, "that a woman should slay the bravest knight that ever was."

But old Hildebrand cried aloud, "Truly she shall be no gainer by the deed," and he leapt upon her, and slew her with a mighty stroke of his broadsword.

Such was the ending of the Nibelung treasure.









